



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF DEBATES**

**Tuesday 24 March 2026**

**REVISED EDITION**



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**Tuesday 24 March 2026**

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

## **RECOGNITION OF VISITORS**

Honourable members, before we move on to our Special Interest Matters this morning, I welcome to the Chamber today year 6 students from The Friends' School. We have two groups coming through. I think this might be the first group. We've just started the formal proceedings for our parliamentary day. Today, Tuesday, is Private Members Day and that gives members of this Chamber the opportunity to bring forward to the parliament matters they have interest or concern with. Then we continue debate, and on Wednesdays and Thursdays we handle government business, where the government brings forward legislation.

I would also like to welcome to the President's Reserve Mr Rod Prince and Mr Jeff Bronstein, who are here as guests of the honourable member for Elwick for her special interest contribution on the Tasmanian Transport Museum. I know all members in the Chamber will make all our guests very welcome here today. Thank you for coming to the Legislative Council.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

## **SPECIAL INTEREST MATTERS**

### **Campbell Town Church Open Day**

[11.03 a.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, it's lovely to see Rod Prince again. I know him and his wife, Trish, quite well, so add my welcome to the parliament.

Who hasn't driven through Campbell Town and admired, and perhaps wondered, what was happening with the church on the main road through Campbell Town? Well, on Sunday 25 January this year there was a welcome day. I saw it advertised on Facebook and thought, I have to go, I have to see what has happened - and what a very special day it was.

This heritage property is both a home and a family business now to the Graham family. After being closed to the public for more than 25 years, Sunday 25 January this year marked the first time the church had been officially opened again to welcome the public back inside. The church was originally built in 1857 as St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, later becoming a Uniting Church, and was constructed of locally quarried sandstone - I'm sure most of you have admired that sandstone - and for generations it served as a place of worship, gathering and community life. Over time, declining attendance saw the church close its doors, and it remained unused for more than 25 years. However, on that day in January, it had been carefully restored, reopened and reimagined as a private heritage property. It is open by appointment as a hospitality venue while preserving its character, history and sense of reverence.

Campbell Town has a deep and enduring Scottish heritage. The town was named in 1821 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, a Scotsman, in honour of his wife, Elizabeth Henrietta Campbell, whose maiden name is also reflected in the Elizabeth River flowing through the town.

Scottish immigration played a significant role in shaping Campbell Town and the surrounding district, and many settlers were drawn to Van Diemen's Land through free land grants, convict labour and opportunity. The Scottish influence became embedded in the region's architecture, agriculture, culture and community life.

Today, as I've said, the church is available for lux-style picnics and picnics with Tasmanian grazing boxes, meetings inside the church, office hire and small meetings in the office, coach and group tour visits, weddings, celebrations and special events to be held through the year.

Nicole, Garry and Jack Graham were our host on that day. It was an absolute delight to be able to look at the restoration that had been done, particularly the restoration of the stained-glass windows. The one on the bottom end that faces the recreation ground has been completed. The one that you can see from the actual main road through Campbell Town is yet to be completed, hence you'll notice some boards up there. That is being restored as we speak.

What a wonderful opportunity not only for Campbell Town, but to renew life into the former St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, and later becoming the Uniting Church in Campbell Town. I know I've stepped into the honourable member for Prosser's area, but I had it longer than he has, so I decided that it was worth taking the risk of actually sharing that with members.

Next time you drive through - I mean, you won't always be able to just walk in, but you can make arrangements to go and look inside, and see what the Graham family - Nicole, Garry and young Jack - have done in restoring that most beautiful building. I urge members and those who might be listening, and our visitors, and perhaps our young people when they're going north, to make an appointment and have a look at what the Grahams have done. Absolute credit to them.

### **Tasmanian Transport Museum, Glenorchy**

[11.08 a.m.]

**Ms THOMAS** (Elwick) - Mr President, I rise today to acknowledge and commend the remarkable contribution of the Tasmanian Transport Museum, a truly unique, volunteer-led organisation that plays an essential role in preserving and celebrating our state's rich transport heritage. Located in Glenorchy, in the heart of my electorate, the museum is far more than a collection of historic machinery. It is a living, breathing community asset, one that brings history to life for families, school groups, tourists and transport enthusiasts alike. I proudly sponsor the museum each year and my support has been used to improve access for those with a disability and to provide uniforms for the heritage bus ride volunteers. As you know, the museum is run entirely by volunteers. It dedicates itself to preserving, maintaining and operating Tasmania's transport history across multiple modes - rail, road and beyond.

Speaking of volunteers, I would like to welcome two gentlemen to the chamber who have committed countless hours of their time to preserve and share Tasmania's rich transport history through their dedicated work with the museum.

Mr Rod Prince was president of the Tasmanian Transport Museum for 11 years and it was his perseverance and his hard work in overcoming many obstacles - and there were a few - that saw the museum finally get onto the Hobart suburban line. Additionally, Rod is a life member of the Tasmanian Transport Museum, and very well deserved.

Joining Rod today is current president of the museum, Mr Jeff Bronstein, who has continued to lead with passion, building on the museum's strong foundations and supporting its volunteers to preserve, restore and showcase Tasmania's transport history for the benefit of the whole community.

On behalf of the people of Elwick and personally, I thank Rod and Jeff for their tireless efforts, their commitment, determination and dedication to the Tasmanian Transport Museum and to our community. I extend my thanks to all of the volunteers who give their time to help maintain and further develop the museum, and who dedicate their weekends to showcasing its collection and making it come to life through the Sunday rides.

The Tasmanian Transport Museum's collection is extensive and deeply significant. It includes steam and diesel locomotives, heritage rail cars and carriages, historic buses, trams, and trolley buses. There is a vast archive safeguarding important historical records, as well as model railways and even horse-drawn transport, offering visitors a comprehensive look at how Tasmanians have moved, worked and connected across generations.

The Tasmanian Transport Museum is not simply about preserving the past; it is about creating meaningful experiences in the present. Through open days, heritage train rides, school excursions and community events, the museum provides educational opportunities and intergenerational connection. It sparks curiosity in young people, offers nostalgia to older Tasmanians, and provides an accessible way for families to spend time together in a unique and engaging environment.

Importantly, the museum has recently expanded its offerings by introducing heritage train rides between Glenorchy and Berriedale. These return journeys have proven extremely popular with locals and visitors alike, sold out every week, offering a unique opportunity to experience Tasmania's rail history in motion while travelling along a scenic section of the Derwent foreshore. This initiative not only enhances the visitor experience but further strengthens the museum's role as an active tourism and community attraction.

It also makes a strong contribution to the local tourism and economy by drawing visitors to Glenorchy and the northern suburbs, and reinforcing the importance of cultural infrastructure outside of the CBD. Like many volunteer organisations, the Tasmanian Transport Museum operates with limited resources but unlimited passion. That is why, in its recent submission to the state government, it is seeking a one-off capital grant in the 2026-27 budget. That's why this is so important.

The museum is seeking funding to improve key infrastructure, including resurfacing outdoor public areas, rebuilding the turntable and extending the carriage shed. These are not just cosmetic upgrades. They are practical improvements that would make the site safer and

more accessible for visitors, including those with mobility challenges, improve operational efficiency, protect valuable heritage assets from environmental exposure, and enhance the visitor experience, enabling the museum to attract more guests and remain sustainable into the future.

Currently, sections of the museum's outdoor public areas are gravel. While this may seem minor, these surfaces can become slippery when wet, dusty in dry conditions, and difficult to navigate for older visitors or those using mobility aids. Resurfacing these areas would significantly improve accessibility and safety, ensuring the museum remains inclusive and welcoming to Tasmanians and visitors from both interstate and overseas.

Similarly, rebuilding the turntable and extending the carriage shed will help safeguard irreplaceable heritage assets and allow more rolling stock to be maintained and displayed.

It's a moderate request of \$124,000, but one that would deliver lasting benefit. Supporting the Tasmanian Transport Museum is about more than just preserving machinery. It is about preserving stories. It is about honouring the ingenuity and labour of past generations. It is about creating educational opportunities for future generations. It is about backing a dedicated group of volunteers who give countless hours of their time to ensure that Tasmania's transport heritage is not lost.

In a time when we rightly speak about tourism, diversification, regional identity and community participation, organisations like the Tasmanian Transport Museum represent exactly the kind of grassroots cultural infrastructure that deserves our support. I commend the museum's ongoing work, and I do hope it will receive the support it needs to thrive so the history it preserves and the special experiences it provides can be enjoyed by many future generations to come. Thank you.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

### **West Tamar Council - Australia Day Awards**

[11.15 a.m.]

**Ms PALMER** (Rosevears - Minister for Education) - Thank you very much, Mr President. Today, I'd like to share something that truly represents and celebrates my community, being the West Tamar Australia Day Awards. At this year's 2026 ceremony, which was held at the Tailrace Centre in Riverside, more than 230 people gathered to celebrate individuals who go above and beyond for others. These awards are not just about recognition of achievement; they honour dedication, selflessness and the values that hold a community together.

The Mayor's Award, the highest award of the night, was shared by two incredible individuals: first, Dr Jessica Horton, Tasmania's Junior National Doctor of the Year, who grew up in beautiful Beauty Point; and second, Lorraine Gardiner, a volunteer ambulance officer who has dedicated 32 years of service to her community. That's more than three decades of helping people in some of their hardest moments, including supporting grieving families after the Beaconsfield gold mine collapse.

Their achievements highlight two powerful forms of contribution: professional excellence and lifelong volunteerism. Lorraine Gardiner's impact didn't stop there. She was also named the West Tamar Citizen of the Year alongside Mr Robert Mantach, who was recognised for his service to the community and decades of volunteering with the Riverside Lions Club, the Lions Tasmania Skin Cancer Foundation and many other organisations. This recognition shows just how deeply their commitment has shaped our community.

There were also other inspiring recipients: Isabelle Winwood was awarded Young Citizen of the Year. Isabelle has a passion for horses. She is a role model and leader in her equestrian community, coaching, mentoring and volunteering with the Northern Tasmanian Eventing Club.

Then there's the Beaconsfield House garden volunteers and they were named the Community Group of the Year. This is the most wonderful group of people who just enjoy fresh air and their hands in the soil. Their gardens are a sight to behold; the produce is used to cook meals for our community members in need and provide fresh produce year round for our community.

The Sidmouth Hall Art Show was awarded Community Event of the Year. Now in its third year and an event I've attended on a regular basis, it attracts more than 50 diverse artists and showcases incredible talent from across the West Tamar.

Each of the winners represents different ways people can contribute, be it through leadership, creativity, teamwork or community spirit; but what makes these awards truly meaningful is not just the winners, but it's what they actually stand for. As Mayor Christina Holmdahl said, these awards recognise people who have made a significant contribution in areas such as health, education, sport, the arts and community service. More importantly, they reflect hard work and selflessness, those true Australian values.

The ceremony was also a reminder that community is always growing. On the same night, 30 people from countries including Nepal, Brazil, India and the UK became Australian citizens. This moment symbolised not just achievement but belonging, highlighting the diversity and shared values that strengthen Australia. What we can learn from all of this is simple but powerful: making a difference doesn't require fame or recognition; it requires commitment, compassion and a willingness to help others. Whether it's saving lives, supporting local events or building connections between people, these award recipients show us that every contribution matters. The West Tamar Australia Day Award recipients of 2026 remind us of what a strong community looks like. They inspire us to step up, get involved and contribute in our own way, because even the smallest actions can have a lasting impact.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

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### **Recognition of Visitors**

[11.19 a.m.]

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Honourable members, I'd like to welcome the second group that are joining us today from The Friends' School. We're currently going through our Special Interest Matters, which we do first up on Tuesdays, where honourable members of the Legislative Council get five minutes to speak on a topic of interest, either on what's happening in their electorate or on any general interest or concern; then we will move on to some notices of

motion; Wednesday and Thursday we do government business. That's where we're at the start of the week. I know that all members here will join me in making you most welcome to the Legislative Council today and hope that you have an enjoyable and informative time in the Tasmanian parliament.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

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**Kirsten Slemint - Cinematographer**

[11.20 a.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Mr President, there are moments in public life when you get to stand up and talk about someone who genuinely fills you with hope. Today is one of those moments, and I have to say it feels even better than the last time I spoke about Kirsten, or Kirsty, Slemint, and I hope this story inspires the young people in the room today.

Last time I spoke, I was making a fundraising pitch. It was October 2021 in this House when I spoke of a young woman from the north-west coast who had done something no other Australian had ever done: she secured a place at the National Film and Television School in England. By the time the fundraising was complete, the community had helped Kirsty raise the full \$160,000, with a \$10,000 donation coming from an anonymous donor in Smithton through the Soroptimist club.

Before taking this opportunity, Kirsty was a young woman from Smithton who went to the University of Queensland and completed not one, but two degrees: a Bachelor of Science majoring in Zoology and Marine Biology, and a Bachelor of Journalism with a distinction average, and the University of Queensland Future Leaders Award. Along the way, she volunteered at the RSPCA, worked as a research assistant at three different university research stations, wrote a live blog for the *Brisbane Times* at the World Science Festival, interned at ABC News, helped produce a three-part documentary on the Great Barrier Reef; and won a New Colombo Plan Scholarship to travel to India, where she made a short documentary on urbanisation.

Kirsty takes storytelling seriously as a craft, and as a vehicle of genuine social change, so she applied to the National Film and Television School in England and she got in. The community got right behind her.

During her studies when she was in the UK, Kirsty flew solo to Israel to shoot her first film, *HaMidbar* - a young woman from Smithton, alone in the Israeli desert, making a documentary. It screened at the Wildlife Film Festival Rotterdam, won best documentary at the Darwen Aldridge Enterprise Studio, and was selected for festivals across Australia and Europe, including official selection for the Wild Earth Oceania film festival in Australia, and Sony Australia Catchlight Film Festival in both their Best Non-Fiction and Best Cinematography categories. It's now streaming on the Newyonder digital platform. Not bad for a first film.

But it's her graduation film, *Burnt Country*, that has truly announced Kirsty to the world. *Burnt Country* was made right here in Tasmania. Kirsty came home for three months in 2023 to shoot it. She worked alongside James Shaw and the team at the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation, who were not subjects of the film but genuine co-creators of it. The

result is a film of extraordinary sensitivity, craft and purpose. I urge you to look it up and watch it.

The recognition for this film has been breathtaking: *Burnt Country* has been selected by more than 40 international film festivals, including Best Student Film at the Frome International Climate Film Festival, and a student BAFTA and longlist selection for One World Media. The film won second prize in the Yale Environment Film Awards. Kirsty has been featured in 'Solo shooting', an article in *British Cinematographer* magazine with a special edition focusing on natural history production, and nominated for the Grierson Documentary Award. She was selected as a finalist in the Academy Awards - yes, the Oscars - and these are just some of the awards. I haven't got time to go through them all.

*Burnt Country* was screened at universities, film festivals and conservation conferences across the UK, Europe, the United States, France, Singapore, Nigeria, Kenya, Vietnam, China, and here in Australia. Kirsty has done more than 15 community screenings right here at home. That's where I first saw it - always coming back, always making sure the people who are part of this journey remain part of this story. It is an incredible film, and then in October, Kirsty was flown to New York as a guest of Sony Pictures. She stood at the United Nations and showcased *Burnt Country* to an international audience; I have got goosebumps if the rest of you haven't. She was presented with the United Nations Sustainability Award, recognising the film's alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This award came with a US\$5000 prize and a professional camera and lens.

In 2021, I told members that Kirsty planned to return to Tasmania once her studies were completed and give back to the state and community, and to ensure that Australian and Tasmanian content was front and centre, created by Tasmanians. That wasn't just a hope for Kirsty, it was always a plan. She could have taken the prize money and the camera, investing them entirely into her own career. No-one would have blinked if she'd done that. Instead, she's working with James Shaw and the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation team to design a series of workshops to teach Indigenous youth how to make films, by making a film with them.

The knowledge, skills, international network, professional equipment - she's bringing all of it back to our community. Because the Tasmanian community invested in her, and the SETAC team trusted her with their stories, and she has not forgotten either of those things for a single day.

Mr President, four-and-a-half years ago, I stood in this parliament and said this was a young Tasmanian who wanted to take our voice to the world and bring it back home. Now we see exactly what that looks like. I'm so proud of Kirsty, and I know our community, our whole state is and should be. The world is paying attention to Kirsty, and I am proud to know this sincere, compassionate, motivated, intelligent young woman - a young woman dedicated to making a difference.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

## Greyhound Racing - Injuries and Deaths

[11.27 a.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Hobart) - Mr President, what a great story from the member for Murchison. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. It's a really terrific start to the day. I feel really proud, vicariously.

Three weeks ago on this day, our family lost a really beloved family member, our little dog, Rocky. Rocky raccoon, Rocky the rock star, the doggy love of my life, and he'd been in our family from the Dogs' Homes of Tasmania for 15 years. He was 17 years old when he died. He was loyal, sweet and feisty. He didn't have many character flaws, but he really hated German shepherds. He was 20 centimetres tall, but he would attack any German shepherd he saw, and we used to joke that he never forgot the war. Rocky was a very pure soul, like all dogs are, and we feel his loss very deeply.

Over the past few weeks, it's given me more cause to contemplate the relationship between human beings and dogs. It's a relationship that's evolved over tens of thousands of years. They are very important to us, they're members of our family, they protect us and they provide us with unconditional love and loyalty.

I digress like this because, of course, our next step as a family is to go off to the Greyhound Adoption Program, where we are now looking for another treasured family member. There are more than 1050 registered racing greyhounds in Tasmania and all of them will need and are looking for a loving home.

I thought it might be a good opportunity to update honourable members on some of the deaths and injuries in the industry since 1 January this year. We know that there have been seven deaths, some of them on track as a result of catastrophic injury, as was the case for Hellyer Dougie, who had compound fractures on both his legs, euthanised on track. Memphis Rains fractured her hock and was later listed as deceased because she'd been sent off to Victoria, where her owners decided she was too expensive to fix and she was euthanised. We have that verified by freedom of information.

Also, in that time there have been 43 injuries on track. There were three of them over the weekend at Launceston: Raging Rambo and Solo Danger were injured and likely to be stood down for 90 days; another dog, How We Go, was injured, likely to be stood down for 14 days.

This is the consequence of greyhound racing, where catastrophic injuries and deaths, on and off track, are just a fact of life. Remember, this very high death and injury rate since 1 January this year also includes a month where there was no racing due to an outbreak of kennel cough, of which greyhounds are more at risk because of the cramped conditions that they live in and the stress that they live under.

In the past week, Wales and Scotland have both voted to ban greyhound racing. New Zealand will end greyhound racing by the middle of this year.

I wanted to draw some members' attention to some of the commentary on social media. I won't go into it too much because it's early in the day, but everyone who's been involved in this issue in recent months, and particularly female elected members, including me and other people in this place, have been subject to some of the most vile, misogynistic abuse on social

media, including Facebook and Instagram. I have copped some on Twitter and we are also receiving emails. The language that's being used is disgusting and offensive. I hope that everyone who has a stake in this issue stays respectful. I will leave members with the thoughts of former Labor premier, David Bartlett, in his opinion piece on the weekend when he said:

When I was premier of Tasmania, I spoke often about a simple ambition: that Tasmania would become a state that is clever, kind and connected.

Clever meant we would compete on brains, education and innovation. Connected meant we would engage confidently with the world. But it was always the word kind that mattered most. Not sentimental kindness. Structural kindness embedded in our laws, our institutions and our economic and social choices.

The decision to end greyhound racing in Tasmania presents an opportunity for more than an industry transition. It presents a moral moment, through which we can consider and embed kindness.

He goes on to say:

Greyhound racing is not immoral because its participants are immoral. Many involved care deeply for their dogs. But good intentions do not alter structural realities. The industry depends on breeding at scale, racing at speed, and accepting injury and wastage as operational risks. When profitability determines an animal's future, discomfort is inevitable.

That discomfort is the beginning of moral progress.

...

Transitions matter. Jobs matter. Communities matter. Government should support those affected by structural change. But industries have evolved before. Forestry practices changed. Manufacturing shifted. Economic transition is not new to Tasmania.

Future generations are unlikely to judge us on wagering revenue or industry turnover. They will judge us on whether we recognised a moral shift when it arrived and whether we had the courage to respond.

The moral arc does not bend by accident. It bends when communities decide that honour lies not in defending tradition at all costs, but in evolving with conscience. Tasmania prides itself on being independent and values driven. This is a moment to prove it.

### **Tasmania Devils at North Hobart**

[11.33 a.m.]

**Mr EDMUNDS** (Pembroke) - Thank you, Mr President. I'm on my feet today briefly to reflect on a historic day on Saturday 21 March 2026, when the Tasmania Devils played their

first VFL game in 18 years and the club's very first game of this iteration of the Devils, which will eventually lead to AFL and AFLW teams representing our state.

The 17-point margin represented a win that claimed these Devils their first four points, sealing a win all round for this state on that day.

More than 10,000 Tasmanians, including several in this Chamber, made their way to North Hobart on a glorious sunny afternoon. Prior to the game, the streets pumped with togetherness, with energy and enthusiasm, and local businesses capitalised on that euphoria.

It was good to see the Hobart City Council get on board the Devils and that they've seen the benefit this club will bring this city.

I won't quite wind back the clock for a match report, but I will lay some bits of information on the table for quiz nights around the state to come.

**Ms Rattray** - They'll do that on Saturday on *The Waterboys* on the radio.

**Mr EDMUNDS** - They will. The score was 14.12 (96) to 11.13 (79), a margin of 17 points. The official crowd was 10,634. The first goal, in fact the first two goals, were kicked by the Devils, came from the nerve-settling boot of Lauderdale's Sam Siggins. The side was captained by Jye Menzie, who stepped up for the injured Robbie Fox.

The leading goal scorers for Tasmania were Jed Hagan and Hugh Dixon with four apiece. Of the nine umpires involved, eight were Tasmanian, from both the TFUA and the NTFUA, including Pembroke's own Mark Holmes in goals.

Tasmanians prove that we will get behind the team. We prove we can fill a footy ground. We prove we can walk or use public transport and not shutter the city's traffic down when more than 10,000 people attend a game of football.

People from around the state and country tuned in via 7mate and 7plus, SEN radio broadcast around the nation and in real time within the venue, and City Park Radio also broadcast. The TV news that night looked a treat. The newspapers looked great all weekend. Our local media prove that they can produce a product on par with the rest of the nation.

In addition, there was national coverage that night and across the weekend, including across the Sunday footy shows. That is awesome. It's not awesome because we need the mainland's gratification. It's awesome because this is where we always belonged.

This club put the map on us, but it also puts us on the map. Days like Saturday don't come out of thin air. We should recognise the countless hours that went in from the Devils on- and off-field staff, the game-day and event and catering staff, the North Hobart Football Club, its board and volunteers; the Coburg Football Club - you can't play without an opposition; the umpires - you certainly can't play without umpires; the Tasmanian Academy of Leadership in Sport, both past and present participants; AFL Tasmania; past players from the previous Devils iteration who were also recognised on the day; and everybody else who joined in on the day or in the lead-up to ensure it was a great experience.

A special shout-out to the food vans that were scattered around the oval, including Pembroke's own Warwick Muir and his team in the Wood Fiery Redhead American BBQ food truck on the far wing.

Now that Saturday is done and won, the game, I believe, in this state has changed. While we still have a job to do, a responsibility to ensure critical infrastructure like the stadium and the high-performance centre are delivered, it is absolutely undeniable that the emergence, or re-emergence, of this club to represent our great state is a game changer and an identity definer of this state.

The VFL side will debut later this year and the men's team backs up in Launceston this weekend. If they didn't already know it, I have bad news for mainland clubs and perhaps the rusted-on parents and grandparents around this state. The next generation will be on the Devils.

I have a quote here from young six-year-old Tom, who loves Richmond so much he cried last year when they lost a meaningless fixture against the Giants.

On Sunday, Tom told his dad:

I like the Devils a little bit more than the Tigers because they're from our land.

**Mr Gaffney** - Not because they won?

**Mr EDMUNDS** - That too. In all seriousness, this club should and will unite our state and after several years of off-field and political slog, I think we can now unite and break the lines together. We're stronger together and I look forward to the Devils continuing to connect us in this state and bring on 2028.

## **MOTION**

### **Parkinson's Disease in Tasmania**

[11.39 a.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Mr President, I move -

- (1) That the Legislative Council notes:
  - (a) Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological condition globally, and Tasmania has among the highest prevalence in Australia, creating a critical public health challenge;
  - (b) Parkinson's is a complex and progressive neurological condition characterised by diverse physical and cognitive symptoms requiring multidisciplinary care;
  - (c) The total economic impact of Parkinson's in Australia, estimated at \$10 billion annually, underscores the urgent need for investment in prevention, care, and support;

- (d) The inequities in government support exist across Australia, with Tasmania's funding and service access lagging behind, placing added burdens on Tasmanians with Parkinson's;
  - (e) Evidence shows exposure to certain pesticides and industrial solvents increases the likelihood of Parkinson's, placing Tasmanians in agricultural regions at greater risk;
  - (f) Critical gaps in service provision exist across Tasmania, including Parkinson's clinics, neurological and gerontology services, in-home care, and early diagnosis support;
  - (g) The need to enhance education and training programs for general practitioners and allied health professionals to support early Parkinson's diagnosis and ongoing, evidence-based care;
  - (h) Despite challenges, Tasmania has a world-class cohort of Parkinson's experts and research institutions, including the University of Tasmania, Menzies Institute, and Wicking Dementia Centre, pioneering innovative care strategies, education, and multidisciplinary approaches that significantly improve outcomes; and
  - (i) Volunteer organisation Parkinson's Tasmania plays a critical role within the cohort as a 'leading voice' for Tasmanians living with Parkinson's, providing essential support, education, advocacy, coordination and cost savings to the State.
- (2) That the Legislative Council calls on the Tasmanian Government to:
- (a) Support the delivery of newly diagnosed Parkinson's clinics and centres of expertise across the state, offering integrated and holistic care throughout all stages of the condition;
  - (b) Work with the Australian Government to develop and implement multidisciplinary, patient-centred care models involving neurologists, allied health professionals, psychologists, and other specialists to provide healthcare to patients with Parkinson's;
  - (c) Support research bodies to examine the links between pesticides and industrial solvents and Parkinson's prevalence, and take the necessary action to protect Tasmanians;
  - (d) Work with the Australian Government to introduce process improvements to integrate State and Federal care systems, repairing fragmented links between inpatient, outpatient, and community care;

- (e) Support the development of a local workforce trained in in-home care, enabling Tasmanians to remain in their homes longer and alleviating an escalating financial burden on Tasmania's health system and Budget; and
- (f) Provide targeted Government support to Parkinson's Tasmania as the central advocacy body for Tasmanians living with Parkinson's, ensuring all those affected can access the high-quality services, education, and support they deserve.

The motion raises key matters related to the neurodegenerative condition of Parkinson's and the challenges we have in this state. In moving this motion, I speak with both conviction and genuine concern for the thousands of Tasmanians living with Parkinson's right now and for the organisations that stand with them every single day.

Parkinson's is not a condition that announces itself gently. It arrives and stays, reshaping how people move, think, how they connect with the world around them. It is progressive, complex, and for many Tasmanians and their families it is an isolating and frightening journey.

I will begin with the scale of what we are confronting. Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurodegenerative condition in the world, not just in Australia. Globally, between 8.5 and 10 million people are currently living with Parkinson's. The number of people with Parkinson's has doubled over the past 25 years and is increasing at approximately 15 per cent per year worldwide. It now affects one in six people over the age of 65, from one in nine in earlier estimates.

Parkinson's is growing faster than Alzheimer's disease, and faster than any other neurodegenerative conditions. This includes multiple sclerosis and motor neurone disease combined. This is the scale, and why we need to be really focused on this.

The World Health Organization has estimated that neurodegenerative diseases, including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, will become the second leading cause of death worldwide by 2040, surpassing cancer. Population ageing is the primary driver of this growth and that is acutely relevant here in Tasmania.

ABS data shows Tasmania has a higher proportion of people over the age of 50 than the national average, and the data goes further. Tasmania has the highest rate of Parkinson's medication prescriptions of any state or territory in Australia. Research being undertaken by Associate Professor Barbara de Graaff, at the University of Tasmania, drawing on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Health Data Hub, confirms this picture.

The prescription data, largely for levodopa, is clear and consistent. Tasmania has, in all likelihood, the highest prevalence of Parkinson's in the country. This is not a footnote. This is a public health emergency unfolding in slow motion across our communities, hospitals and our homes. Parkinson's currently costs the Tasmanian state government an estimated \$165 million per year. Based on the progression of the condition and improved diagnostics in Tasmania's ageing demographic, that figure is expected to double by 2040.

For individual Tasmanians, the out-of-pocket cost of managing the condition is estimated to be around \$15,000 per year. That figure does not include the loss of income for a person

living with Parkinson's, nor the loss of income for their care partner. Many do not have the disposable income to meet these costs.

When we look at the total national picture, the economic cost of Parkinson's in Australia is estimated at around \$10 billion annually. These are not abstract numbers. They represent lives disrupted, careers cut short, families stretched to breaking point, and a health system absorbing costs that could, with the right investment, be reduced or delayed. Given that Parkinson's generally doesn't impact one's life expectancy, Tasmanians are living with Parkinson's for years, often decades.

Here is what makes this particularly important in the context of the 20-year preventive health strategy that Parkinson's Tasmania has also been engaging with. The evidence suggests that approximately 80 per cent of Parkinson's cases may be preventable or delayable. Only about 20 per cent of the cases are linked to genetic factors. The other 80 per cent involve environmental triggers and lifestyle risk factors that we can act on.

As Professor Jane Alty, one of the world leading Parkinson's researchers based right here in Tasmania, has noted, a decade ago we did not think we could prevent dementia. Now dementia prevention is an accepted strategy. The same is possible for Parkinson's. Prevention is no longer aspirational, it's achievable and it is essential.

Parkinson's is far more than a movement disorder. The tremors and the rigid gait are what most people picture when they hear the word Parkinson's. But Parkinson's is also depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment, sleep disorders, swallowing difficulties, loss of smell, hallucinations, dementia and a cascade of other non-motor symptoms that are often invisible to the outside world but can be deeply debilitating for those experiencing them. The mix of motor and non-motor symptoms have had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of care partners and families. We know our community is impacted by Parkinson's experience, stigma, isolation and significant social impacts.

This complexity, which has been described as the Parkinson's iceberg, means that the condition requires not just one specialist, but many: neurologists, Parkinson's nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, exercise physiologists, psychologists, social workers, dietitians and continence nurses all have a role to play. Multidisciplinary care is not a luxury. It should not be considered luxury. It is an essential model of care, particularly for people with Parkinson's, and this is what the evidence demands.

Critically, Parkinson's often begins 20 to 30 years before diagnosis with early non-motor symptoms such as sleep disruption and loss of smell. This is why early detection matters so much. The earlier the intervention, the better the outcomes for the individual, for their care partner, and obviously for our health system. This motion acknowledges all of that directly.

Mr President, Tasmania's challenges with Parkinson's care are both structural and geographic. We have critical gaps in dedicated Parkinson's clinics and centres of expertise. We have shortfalls in neurological services; if anyone has tried to see a neurologist, you'll understand. Tasmania has only 17 registered neurologists compared with 57 in South Australia, despite South Australia having a similar demographic profile. This disparity is staggering and unacceptable.

We have inadequate access to in-home care that would allow people to remain in their homes and independent for longer.

We have a general practice and allied health workforce that, through no fault of their own, have often lacked access to Parkinson's specific training.

The anecdotal evidence from the Tasmanian Health Service suggests that people with Parkinson's are admitted to hospital at three times the rate of those without the condition, a direct consequence of a system that is reactive rather than proactive in this area.

We also know that people with Parkinson's are more likely to stay in hospital for longer due to more complications during admission, so at increased risk of falls and injuries, chest infections like pneumonia and swallowing difficulties, and urinary tract infections given their continence challenges. Delays or missed doses of time-critical medication worsen symptoms like rigidity or immobility.

Mr President, I've worked in hospitals, I know what it's like. You have the scheduled time for your patients to receive their medications, and something happens and you just can't get back. This medication is time-critical. These people are much better cared for in our community, not in an acute hospital setting. Reduced mobility, even for a short period in bed, can cause rapid loss of strength and function, triggering longer rehabilitation and discharge until they can safely move again.

As we know, these hospitals are the worst type of place to care for people with Parkinson's and other conditions, unless there is some other acute medical reason that has them there. Confusion or delirium, especially in unfamiliar hospital settings, is common. Hallucinations or dementia in the latter stage of the condition can complicate care and prolong admission.

We need to be sure that every dollar spent in the acute health setting is not being spent on costs that could have been avoided - that is in situations where timely access and support to our primary and preventative health services and early diagnosis could have prevented admission. This matters. It matters even more right now.

The north-east and the north-west of the state stand as stark examples in the wrong way - regions with no relevant Parkinson's specific specialist services at all, areas that are largely agricultural - and this is not good enough. This leads me to another dimension of this motion that I want to address directly because it's too important to pass over lightly.

The evidence linking certain pesticides and industrial solvents to Parkinson's is serious and growing. The World Health Organization has already called for the banning of pesticides such as paraquat and chlorpyrifos and chemicals such as trichloroethylene, which have been linked to the onset of Parkinson's. The use of paraquat has already been banned in the United States and China, yet it continues to be used here in Tasmania in forestry, general agriculture and poppy farming.

Research indicates that up to 80 per cent of Parkinson's cases may involve environmental triggers. This is why the north-east and north-west are so important here because we have such a large agricultural sector. The study from the University of Alabama found that preventable

environmental risk factors may account for nearly one in three Parkinson's cases amongst men and one in four among women.

As I've said, Tasmania is an agricultural state. Our farming communities, the people who grow our food, tend our land and have built their lives in regional Tasmania, may be at elevated risk, but we have no services in those areas. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority is currently reviewing the use of paraquat. We need the Tasmanian government to actively engage with the process and take protective action. This is not alarmism. It is responsible public health governance, and it sits directly within the scope of the Parkinson's Tasmania 20-year preventive health strategy and is something I urge our government to take seriously.

I want to now speak about Tasmania's genuine strengths because this motion is not just a catalogue of deficiency. We do have some strengths. It's also acknowledgement that we have, in Tasmania, world-class expertise and world-class institutions in this area. The University of Tasmania, the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, and the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre represent a remarkable concentration of knowledge and capacity.

Professor Michele Callisaya has recently secured \$2.88 million in federal government funding for the ParkinsonNet Australia research project, an internationally recognised best-practice multidisciplinary model of care first developed in the Netherlands and shown to lower disability hospitalisation rates and healthcare costs.

Research is so important. This presents Tasmania with a unique opportunity to lead this research and benefit from its translational application to Tasmanian communities: a bespoke multidisciplinary network across the state where informed and continuative care close to home is accessible and responsible. We owe this to our fellow Tasmanians, particularly those in our rural communities.

Complementary but separate to Parkinson's Australia, the Tasmania Parkinson's Project is a research and community initiative run by the University of Tasmania that focuses on improving life for people with Parkinson's. The project is building a research registry of people with Parkinson's that are willing to take part in studies and be contacted about new research. I encourage anyone who's interested to look it up and get involved.

The project is spearheaded by Professor Jane Alty, a neurologist and clinical researcher. Professor Alty has developed the TAS Test, a world-first online screening tool using artificial intelligence to measure hand movements, speech patterns and cognitive abilities to identify those at higher neurological risk, which is now gaining global attention.

The UTAS Parkinson's Massive Open Online Course, or MOOC, co-developed by Professors Alty and Callisaya, has been completed by more than 20,000 people from 156 countries and is being celebrated internationally. I know there are a lot of Tasmanians who participated in that. Its content is consumer-focused, capturing lived experience with a beautiful blend of clinical and practical care information. It's a game changer and funded in part by philanthropists who are committed to improving education and accessible information to everyone, anywhere, anytime, and it's free.

What is evident is that we need better and more reliable data on Parkinson's so we can inform policy, budget allocation, and effort. Associate Professor Barbara de Graaff from the

University of Tasmania is building the health economic evidence base on Parkinson's prevalence and cost in Tasmania. I urge the government to look at her work and consider it well.

Tasmania has one university; it has an ageing population; a small geographic scale that allows it to pilot and scale solutions faster than anywhere else; and a collaborative cohort of researchers, clinicians, health professionals and advocates who operate in a way that could genuinely be described as best practice. We have the right elements to lead the nation in Parkinson's prevention, detection and multidisciplinary care.

At the centre of the lived experience of Parkinson's in Tasmania is Parkinson's Tasmania. Parkinson's Tasmania was established 40 years ago to serve the needs of people affected by Parkinson's. For four decades, it has been sustained almost entirely by volunteers at a board level and operationally. When you look at what this disease costs the state, one would think that when there are opportunities here to model and pilot some of the work that's coming out of our university and research centres, this is where we should be looking.

That extraordinary commitment of Parkinson's Tasmania has delivered real results: support groups, peer connections, an information phone line, education, advocacy, and navigation assistance through a complex health system. It has been the leading voice for Tasmanians with Parkinson's, and it saves the state money: every time it helps someone navigate the system effectively, every time it supports a carer who might otherwise burn out, every time it enables someone to stay at home rather than entering residential care permanently, or every time it avoids hospital admission.

However, the environment is changing. Backed by close to \$1 million in federal government funding, the National Parkinson's Alliance - in which Parkinson's Tasmania plays a key national role - has developed the National Parkinson's Action Plan (NPAP). This plan was launched in Canberra on 24 March by the Parliamentary Friends of Parkinson's. This is set to be a game changer, but only if Parkinson's Tasmania secures funding to implement the key initiatives flowing from the plan. This is funding that actually prevents cost to our system; otherwise Tasmanians will miss out. Tasmanians with some of the highest rates of Parkinson's and the risk of Parkinson's will miss out.

This will only add to the inequity that our Parkinson's community faces on a daily basis across the state, and more acutely in the north-west and north-east. Prevalence is increasing; demand for services is growing; research activity is expanding; government policy activity is intensifying; and philanthropic interest is building, which is great, but we do need the government to step up as well. The volunteer model, which has served Tasmania so well for 40 years, can no longer carry this workload alone. This is not a criticism; it's an honest recognition of the scale of what's being asked, and I acknowledge the volunteers that have given their hearts and souls to this organisation for 40 years.

As we approach the state budget, the pressure on community service is acute. We all know that. Organisations across Tasmania are being asked to do more with less. Parkinson's Tasmania is one of these essential organisations. For the first time in its history, it has sought targeted support from government to meet rising demand, to sustain its operational capacity, and to fulfil its potential as the central coordination point for the Parkinson's community in this state.

I'm pleased to learn recently of Parkinson's Tasmania's innovative new partnership with Lifeline Tasmania. This collaboration will expand existing Lifeline services to better recognise and care for people living with Parkinson's. Parkinson's Tasmania is also collaborating closely with Palliative Care Tasmania and MS Plus to identify opportunities to share resources, consolidate effort, and cross-pollinate through education, peer support, and cross-referral/shared navigation pathways. It's exactly the kind of cross-sector initiative that delivers better outcomes for vulnerable Tasmanians, and it's the kind of initiative that deserves to be supported and sustained.

Whilst they are asking for financial support, they're also looking at the best ways they can to make the most of the money that they hopefully will see, to deliver the services they do so amazingly well. With targeted budget support, Parkinson's Tasmania can continue to ensure that no Tasmanian living with Parkinson's has to face that journey alone.

This motion calls for the Tasmanian government to act on a clear and comprehensive agenda: to support newly diagnosed Parkinson's clinics and centres of expertise; to work with the Australian Government on multidisciplinary, patient-centred care models; to support research into pesticides and solvent links, and take protective action; to integrate state and federal care systems and repair fragmented pathways; to develop a local workforce trained in in-home care; and to provide targeted support for Parkinson's Tasmania as the central advocacy body for Tasmanians affected by this condition.

None of these asks is unreasonable. All of them are achievable, and the evidence base compiled by world-leading Tasmanian researchers, clinicians and people living with Parkinson's and their carers, is there to support every one of them. They're not asking for things that aren't realistic or they haven't already been delivering in some form or other.

The decisions we make in this place, the allocations made in the budget, have real consequences for real people. We need to remember the people behind the numbers, such as a person in the north-west right now managing a Parkinson's diagnosis without adequate specialist support; a care partner, perhaps a spouse, perhaps an adult child, wondering how much longer they can hold everything together; a researcher waiting for the government investment that would allow a world-leading prevention model to be piloted right here in Tasmania.

Tasmania has the expertise, the institutions, the research capability and an extraordinary organisation in Parkinson's Tasmania that is ready to do the work. What is needed now is the will and the funding to match that commitment. Investment in primary care, multidisciplinary care and early diagnosis support will save the health budget money. You will save the money by reducing hospital admissions and improved quality of life for those with Parkinson's and their carers.

I close in acknowledging the expertise, dedication and experience - including lived experience - of those who provide support to people with Parkinson's. Some of the people providing this support are Parkinson's sufferers themselves or people with Parkinson's. I acknowledge the amazing team at Parkinson's Tasmania, including the chair and president, Claire Myers, former chair Mike Whitehouse OAM, and all those involved in the critical research being done, particularly at our own university, the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre and the Menzies Research Centre. I say to them: your work is critical and appreciated.

I absolutely appreciate the pressure on our state's finances. I've been banging on about it for quite some time. However, where funding of community organisations and research can and does reduce hospital admissions, and thus costs, and enables people to live more productive lives with enhanced quality of life, the savings occur not just in our health budget but in other areas of our budget as well. I commend this motion to the House and urge the government to respond to it with the seriousness and urgency it deserves.

[12.03 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President. I'm pleased to rise to make a brief contribution and to support this motion put forward by the member for Murchison and thank her for doing so. It's important to raise this matter which highlights the challenges faced by many Tasmanians and their loved ones, and it's a very worthy thing for this Chamber to be considering and to be encouraging the government to act on. This is a timely debate with the expected launch of the National Parkinson's Action Plan today in the Australian Parliament House in Canberra.

As the honourable member has already informed the Chamber, Parkinson's is currently the second most common neurological condition in the world, but is becoming the fastest neurological disorder impacting people across the world; yet our understanding of the disease and our treatments for it are not keeping pace.

We know Parkinson's disease is a movement disorder of the nervous system that worsens over time. We know that a range of symptoms can emerge slowly for some people and quite suddenly for others.

Symptoms may begin at any stage of life: for those other gen Xers, Michael J Fox probably comes to the forefront of our mind as someone from our youth, who we watched in movies, who was struck down at quite a young age - I think at 29 he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Symptoms may begin at any stage of life. The first symptom may be barely a noticeable tremor in just one hand or sometimes a foot or the jaw. Or people may experience their face no longer shows expression or their speech begins to slur. Such a diverse range of symptoms, with some or all striking those diagnosed with this disease.

Yet, despite that extensive range of symptoms, there is one commonality that is shared across them all: there is no cure. As I do not have a medical background, I'm not going to recite the range of symptoms and experiences so familiar to those who live with Parkinson's or those who care for someone living with Parkinson's, but suffice to say, I think we would all agree, this is a cruel disease.

The member for Murchison has detailed much of the impacts of this disease, and I thank her for doing so faithfully in her contribution; I won't seek to repeat it in such detail. However, in researching in order to contribute to this motion, I was struck by recent statistics detailed in a 2024 report, Ecosystem of Parkinson's in Australia Project, which was prepared by Professor George D Mellick for Parkinson's Australia. That report laid out that more than 1 million Australians are impacted by this disease. There are up to 19,500 new cases diagnosed every year, and over 13,400 of those diagnosed are of working age. Parkinson's reaps an estimated cost to the national economy of more than \$10 billion per annum, both in lost revenue and ongoing healthcare costs, and other associated costs.

Professor Mellick's 2024 report also provides an estimated breakdown of people diagnosed with Parkinson's for each of the federal electorates, which I found quite interesting to look at, in relation to our state. It was quite interesting and concerning reading, that during 2021, which was the year noted:

- The electorate of Bass had 73 people diagnosed as developing Parkinson's that year: 23 females and 50 males - a total of 456 people living with Parkinson's in the electorate of Bass.
- For 2021 in the electorate of Braddon, it was estimated that 82 people developed Parkinson's in that year: 26 females and 56 males, with a total of 505 people living with Parkinson's in that electorate.
- For Clark, which is one of the federal seats my electorate of Nelson partially spans, it's estimated that 64 people in 2021 developed Parkinson's: 21 females and 43 males.
- Also for the total for Franklin for the year of 2021, the other federal electorate that my electorate partially spans, had an estimated 75 people diagnosed with Parkinson's: 24 females and 51 males.
- Lastly, Lyons had an estimated 81 people who developed Parkinson's in 2021: 24 females and 57 males.

Obviously, these figures, being based on 2021 data, are now a little out of date. However, what we do know of this disease tells us there will not have been a reversal of these figures over time. Each Tasmanian electorate is experiencing approximately 100 new diagnoses of Parkinson's each year, I believe. Clearly, when faced with the diagnosis of an incurable, chronic and progressive disease which steadily erodes your functionality, these Tasmanians are going to require assistance.

Which brings us to part (2) of the motion before us, which details a form of action plan that we would be requesting the government to undertake. Paragraphs (2)(b) and (2)(d) call on the Tasmanian government to work with the federal government to develop multidisciplinary, patient-centred care models involving specialists including neurologists, allied health professionals and psychologists, to improve health care to patients with Parkinson's, and to introduce process improvements to integrate state and federal care systems, repairing fragmented links between inpatient, outpatient and community care systems. This call is eminently sensible, cost-effective and based on common sense.

According to a Deloitte Access economics report commissioned by Parkinson's Australia and released in 2015, governments bore around two-thirds of the health system costs, which was about 68.3 per cent, while individuals bore 17.8 per cent of the costs, and other parties, such as private health insurance and charities, bore the remaining 13.9 per cent of the costs. When breaking down the governments' costs, the federal government bore approximately 41.4 per cent of those costs, with state and territories bearing the remaining 26.9 per cent.

In 2014, the health system cost of Parkinson's disease, including additional costs from associated falls and pneumonia, were approximately \$567.7 million, an increase of \$223.8 million since 2005. The average health system cost per person with Parkinson's disease was \$8202 per annum in 2014. Those figures are out of date, but according to Parkinson's Tasmania, in their response to Tasmania's 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy of 2025, the

disease currently costs the state government here in Tasmania an estimated \$165 million per year, with this estimate expected to be doubled by 2040.

Available evidence indicates that Tasmania has the highest number of people living with Parkinson's in all of Australia, which our ageing demographic is only going to exacerbate. As we know, the current precarious nature of the state's financial situation makes collaborating with and providing the necessary care and research into future options for the welfare of Tasmanians living with Parkinson's absolutely essential.

Subparagraphs (2)(a), (2)(c) and (2)(e) of the motion call on the state government to support the delivery of the following things -

- Clinics and centres offering integrated and holistic care throughout all stages of the condition for those newly diagnosed with Parkinson's.
- Research bodies to examine the links between pesticides and industrial solvents and Parkinson's prevalence.

And also -

- The development of a local workforce trained in-home care, enabling Tasmanians to remain in their homes longer and alleviating an escalating financial burden on Tasmania's health system and budget.

Again, all sound like commonsense and compassionate courses of action for the state government to invest in.

Further, these paragraphs and subparagraphs are consistent with Parkinson's Tasmania's submission in response to Tasmania's 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy discussion paper of 2025.

Parkinson's Tasmania's 2025 submission also has specific bearing on the last subparagraph of the motion before us, subparagraph (2)(f), which calls on the government to support Parkinson's Tasmania as the central advocacy body for Tasmanians living with Parkinson's.

Parkinson's Tasmania's document states at point 7:

Enable and support Parkinson's Tasmania to be a sustainable organisation for people living with Parkinson's. Parkinson's Tasmania can be the coordination point and secretariat for other key stakeholder groups in the Parkinson's cohort and provide a centralised voice on policy and related matters. Navigating the complex health system is another gap that exists, and Parkinson's Tasmania could assist as a key enabler for the 20 Year Preventive Health Strategy.

The key phrase there, of course, is 'sustainable organisation'. Sadly, the current government does not have a strong track record in fostering and supporting sustainability for non-government and community sector support and service organisations. It simply doesn't. We

know that because right now those organisations are crying out to not be cut to ribbons in the upcoming state budget.

We really shouldn't have to debate and pass motions in this place calling for the government to ensure sustainability of crucial support services providing such a practical and support role for many Tasmanians struggling with this cruel disease. It should be regarded as an essential cog within our preventive and multidisciplinary healthcare model.

The data, statistics and the projections demonstrate the urgent need felt by hundreds of Tasmanians currently diagnosed with Parkinson's and the numerous others about to face such a diagnosis.

In light of the fact that Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological condition in the world, and given the increasing prevalence of the condition and the demographics here in Tasmania that will have a significant economic, social and cultural impacts, an integrated and urgent public health response is needed to prevent the onset of Parkinson's in Tasmania.

As stated by the organisation in question:

Parkinson's Tasmania is uniquely positioned to contribute to the development and implementation of Tasmania's 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy. We understand the critical importance of early intervention, prevention and sustained engagement in improving health outcomes for people living with Parkinson's.

It would be a significant and valid investment for the state government to develop a funding plan to ensure Parkinson's Tasmania is placed on a sustainable footing to ensure it can continue to provide the essential support mechanisms that so many Tasmanians have required and will continue to require.

I'm very pleased to support this motion.

[12.14 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Thank you, Mr President. I thank the honourable member for Murchison for raising this issue and these questions in the Legislative Council.

Parkinson's disease is a confronting and tragic neurological condition, and Tasmanians suffer greater risk than other Australians. I commend the motion and would like to express my appreciation to the honourable member for Murchison for advocating for greater recognition and support of Parkinson's disease in Tasmania. As per usual, the honourable member's speech has been both informative and engaging and does provide us with a lot of information.

I can remember in this place, also in 2010, raising questions of the then minister for Health, Michelle O'Byrne, on behalf of the president of Parkinson's Tasmania - at that stage it was Helen Connor-Kendray - regarding the issue of funding for specialist Parkinson's disease nurse educators.

In more recent times, I've attended and was asked to present at Parkinson's forums on the north-west coast, especially interested at the time of the voluntary assisted dying debate and discussion. My involvement with the Tasmanian voluntary assisted dying situation has given

me proximity to those advocating for, experiencing and caring for those affected by Parkinson's disease.

The motion initially notes the complexity and prevalence of Parkinson's globally, and its impact and likelihood in Tasmania. The neurological condition is one which wholly impacts quality of life of a person suffering it, presenting in motor and non-motor symptoms, with no cure currently available.

It is undeniable that Tasmania's health outcomes are worse than other Australian states; it suffers lower investment, health education, and lower median wages. This makes Tasmanians more vulnerable to health conditions such as Parkinson's. I believe the honourable member touched slightly on, or pointed out, the difference in the number of nurses available in both South Australia and Tasmania, and the impacts it has.

As such, Tasmania must ensure it does everything it can to provide for those suffering, improve outcomes of those diagnosed with Parkinson's, and ensure Tasmanians have access to adequate facilities to support education on Parkinson's disease, diagnosis and management. As the honourable member for Murchison notes in her notice, early diagnosis is crucial to the management of Parkinson's in Tasmania.

To be candid, a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease has been found to have a median survival of roughly 10 years. Though many suffering from Parkinson's disease live longer than this, it also has an immeasurable impact on quality of life and the welfare of those individuals and their families. Early diagnosis and intervention allow better management and quality-of-life outcomes for patients. Every dollar spent towards early diagnosis and investigation of causation and correlation is a dollar well spent.

The member for Nelson provided some Tasmanian statistics of highly significant numbers of Tasmanians: notably, Parkinson's is about 1.5 times more common in men than women. Symptoms and changes also differ between men and women: it's believed that oestrogen is believed to have some neuroprotective benefits, and that's why the onset in men is earlier. However, regardless of the gender difference of Tasmanians, all Tasmanians deserve our support with this terrible disease. Our healthcare system is hurting, and efforts to create a workforce dedicated to in-home care for Parkinson's disease would benefit Tasmanians, provide special services to ease the burden on the healthcare system, and benefit the outcomes and dignity of those suffering from Parkinson's disease.

The interlinkages between pesticides, industrial solvents and Parkinson's prevalence are not solely a Tasmanian question. We have access to a wealth of international and national knowledge and expertise, and, as the member for Murchison notes, we house world-class experts in Parkinson's disease and research institutions. Research into Parkinson's is something that Tasmania should foster, for the betterment of not just Tasmania, but for humanity.

I'm not going to go to this space very often, but the poor state we find ourselves in fiscally means important funding that should be available for Tasmanians in other spaces - a football field - is going to impact. In a similar sense, it's important to support advocacy groups, integration of state and federal government care systems, and promote the best patient-care models possible.

I would like to state my wholehearted support for the motion, and once again thank the honourable member for Murchison for her efforts in this area.

[12.19 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for an informative and thorough contribution. I also acknowledge the two previous speakers as well, who both provided very useful information. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the member for bringing the motion and this opportunity to speak on the matter of Parkinson's disease in Tasmania. I acknowledge and recognise the member and other members as well: hearing that the member for Mersey asked questions back in 2010 - and that had slipped my mind - there's been strong advocacy in this place for a long time on this very important area.

As previously stated by a number of speakers, Parkinson's disease is the fastest-growing neurological disease in Australia, with around 3000 people directly affected in Tasmania alone: quite a sobering number. It's a complex, debilitating condition in which parts of the brain become progressively damaged over many years, caused by the loss of nerve cells.

People with Parkinson's experience a broad range of symptoms: from disordered sleep and cognitive impairment to slowness of movement and tremors. Sadly, right now there is no cure for Parkinson's disease, but interventions are available to manage symptoms, support health and wellbeing and maintain quality of life.

There are several organisations operating across Tasmania which are doing fantastic work to advance clinical research and patient care for Tasmanians living with Parkinson's disease. They include: the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, Parkinson's Tasmania, and Wings for Parkinson's. These were also previously acknowledged by the member for Murchison.

General practitioners and Parkinson's disease nurse consultants are on the front line in diagnosing Parkinson's and recognising and managing complications. They work closely with the relevant medical specialists, for example: neurology, geriatric medicine, older person psychiatry, and Parkinson's disease-trained allied health professionals. The Tasmanian Health Service provides intermediate, acute, rehabilitative and palliative care in hospitals, outpatient clinics and in the home environment.

In the south of the state, I'm advised that the neurological nursing service is joining with allied health professionals to form an interdisciplinary Parkinson's disease hub. The hub will provide people living with Parkinson's and their loved ones with improved access to more coordinated care. This is part of current work being undertaken to develop and implement an evidence-based clinical care pathway for people with Parkinson's admitted to the Royal Hobart Hospital. This care pathway may then be implemented statewide as appropriate.

In the north, the Parkinson's disease service supports patients through a nurse practitioner, who undertakes two Parkinson's disease and movement disorder clinics per week, and a clinical nurse consultant. This service sees patients in their place of residence or in the hospital. In addition, the Launceston General Hospital neurology team, together with the geriatrician from Hobart, provide three full-day clinics per month supporting the northern Parkinson's disease service.

In the north-west, there are dedicated Parkinson's disease nurses who support new referrals from GPs, specialist residential aged care facilities, allied health staff, and self-referrals. These nurses provide a range of services, from clinical and emotional support for those who are newly diagnosed, through to advanced stages of the disease and end-of-life palliative care.

The Tasmanian government is also supporting national work in this space, with the National Parkinson's Alliance funded by the Australian Government with \$800,000 over two years to develop a National Parkinson's Action Plan. It's fitting that we are discussing this motion to coincide with the launch of that National Parkinson's Action Plan, which is happening today at Parliament House in Canberra, another matter that's already been shared with the Chamber. The main goals of the action plan are to deliver a coordinated national approach to early diagnosis, improving access to care and treatments, bolstering research, supporting carers and reducing the stigma associated with living with Parkinson's disease through a community-driven approach.

Tasmania is fortunate to have a world-class cohort of Parkinson's experts and research institutions, and current research partnerships include: the Tasmanian Parkinson's Project, which aims to improve the lives of people with Parkinson's through research and education; ParkinsonNet, which is a model of care being trialled in Tasmania, training allied health professionals, developing clinical networks, and linking people with Parkinson's to providers. This research is led by the Menzies Institute for Medical Research at the University of Tasmania. Hospitals South, Parkinson's Tasmania, and the University of Tasmania have been successful in obtaining a Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation grant to co-design, implement, and evaluate an education program for people with Parkinson's and their care partners when newly diagnosed. Parkinson's Tasmania has also contributed funding to this research.

It's important to highlight the innovative work being done on the 'More than a Dream' research project being conducted by the Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation. This project is investigating the cognitive motor function of people with sleep disorder compared to healthy controls and those with Parkinson's disease, to develop a simple low-cost screening test to detect Parkinson's disease decades earlier.

I am also advised that the Department of Health is aware of research suggesting links between prolonged exposure to certain chemicals - also raised by the member for Murchison - and Parkinson's disease but is yet to establish any conclusive evidence to prompt a specific health response. The Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing would welcome the sharing of any information and research that members in this place or members of our community may have access to so it can be referred to the department for careful consideration. Regarding the contributions this morning, I felt they were very helpful and know that it was also appreciated by the adviser in the Chamber.

**Ms Forrest** - I don't think the US and China banned paraquat for no reason - just saying.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution of Parkinson's Tasmania as a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organisation providing education, advice, advocacy, community engagement and support groups statewide for people with Parkinson's and their carers and partners.

The department is working closely on shared priorities with Parkinson's Tasmania including implementing the care pathway and education program for people with Parkinson's that I mentioned earlier, and exploring the development of a Tasmanian Parkinson's register. Parkinson's Tasmania are valued contributors and partners in our state and in national policy development through membership of the National Parkinson's Alliance and in development of the new National Parkinson's Action Plan, input into The Health Revolution - 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy currently being developed, and collaboration on the development of the Parkinson's Massive Open Online Course.

On behalf of the Tasmanian government, I'd also like to recognise the strong advocacy work of Dr Harley Stanton. Dr Stanton is a retired World Health Organization public health scientist who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in recent years. He is the founder of the advocacy and prevention group Wings for Parkinson's, and is also the chair of the National Parkinson's Alliance.

The Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing will continue to meet regularly with Parkinson's Tasmania and Dr Harley Stanton to keep informed on developments in this important area.

Madam Acting President, in closing, on behalf of the government, I sincerely thank all our dedicated practitioners and researchers who are working tirelessly to support the prevention, detection and treatment of Parkinson's disease right across our state.

Also, in response to the funding questions that were put, and they were really important points that were made on the funding and that early intervention and keeping patients out of the hospital system, it was certainly well noted. Always, any decision on new and extended funding is considered as part of the normal state budget community consultation submission process that occurs every year. I feel sure that is one that will be front and centre as well of those funding considerations.

Mr President, the government appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this motion and notes the motion.

[12.31 p.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Mr President, I acknowledge and thank the members who've made a contribution on this motion and to the Leader for her response.

Sometimes, I think we have to take a long time to actually react to international research that clearly shows there's a problem and I made point by interjection and said, particularly when you look at countries like the US and China that have actually banned paraquat already, why wouldn't we be looking at that more seriously. Hopefully we will see that in this. When I think about it, our rural communities who are exposed to these sorts of substances on an ongoing basis, the risk is real and we do need to take it seriously. Hopefully, this motion will contribute to our state government working with the federal government and the regulator there on this matter.

I did expect to get a response around the budget, as we got from the Leader that it is a matter for the budget process. Of course it is. But if we don't raise these matters in this place in ways like this, then it often gets washed away in the demand for money from everywhere.

Seriously, if we're going to get our budget under control, we need to look everywhere. We know one of the biggest hungry beasts in the budget is health.

Health have repeatedly overspent their budget by millions and millions of dollars and when you see an ask here from a community organisation that delivers services directly into the health space but also has broader impacts, as I described in my contribution. I'm not asking for a commitment here and now, and we weren't going to get that, but I would hope we will see a much different approach taken to these organisations because that's where you save money - rather than just patching up, topping up and, actually, looking at the health department, it is meeting hardly any of its performance indicators. We don't know the money we're pouring into health is actually delivering the outcomes we expect.

Parkinson's Tasmania is an organisation with runs on the board. It has survived through the goodwill of so many volunteers, and I thank them all over the 40 years. A lot of these people who've been involved have been directly impacted by Parkinson's, either as a person with Parkinson's or a carer or loved one of that person. It's not like they don't know what they're talking about.

We have a real opportunity in this state, as I alluded to with my speech, to work together to develop a pilot that can really lead the nation and potentially lead the world because some of our research being done here is informing international research in this area and care for people with Parkinson's.

I also didn't mention Dr Harley Stanton, who has given years and years and years of service to this area. I do acknowledge the work that he's done. It's funny, sometimes the people who are actually engaged in this space are the people who end up with the disease themselves. There's not a connection there - the passion they've shown and now they're living the experience themselves. It must be an extraordinary and a difficult position to find yourself in at times. The lived experience does certainly give those people a very real understanding of the challenges.

I will obviously be looking for this in the budget, when we get to there. It is a cost-saving measure to government. We have the opportunity here in Tasmania to be real leaders and we should take it. I acknowledge the work of all those involved in our research, our amazing institutions that are delivering on so much really important research. I know it costs money to fund research, but without it, we just go backwards.

To the people at the UTAS Menzies Institute for Medical Research and the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, I absolutely acknowledge and thank them for their work.

I thank the members for their contribution, and this is not something that will go away. It's something that we'll need to keep at the front of our minds when we're looking at funding for health services.

I note some of the Leader's comments regarding services around our regions. What I was talking about particularly is a multidisciplinary service for people with Parkinson's because Parkinson's nurses are a really important cog in that wheel, but they cannot deliver all the other services that a person with Parkinson's needs. It's not just Parkinson's for which we need to take this multidisciplinary approach. Whether it be any neurological degenerative disease or many other diseases or conditions that require that multidisciplinary approach, they save money. You

have to invest in the front end, and I commend Parkinson's Tasmania working with other similar organisations to see how they can maximise their impact, which we all should be doing. I thank members for their contribution and the Leader's response to the debate. It's not something that I'll be forgetting.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **MOTION**

### **Florfenicol Use in Tasmania**

[12.37 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Hobart) - Mr President, I move -

That the Legislative Council:

- (1) Notes evidence presented to Parliament during the Budget Estimates process confirming more than 800 kilograms of the antibiotic, Florfenicol, was used by salmon companies in South East waters in just three weeks following its recent federal approval for use in Tasmania.
- (2) Notes that data about the quantity of antibiotics used by salmon corporations is not made public as a matter of course, and the fact that 815 kilograms of Florfenicol was used in Tasmanian fish farms in such a short period of time is only known to the public due to Parliamentary scrutiny.
- (3) Further notes the ongoing use of Florfenicol in SE waters has led to Public Health advice to swimmers and recreational fishers, and the temporary closure of the rock lobster fishery.
- (4) Notes an application has been made by Tassal to use Florfenicol at Okehampton Bay, in the rich recreational and fishing waters of the Mercury Passage.
- (5) Agrees that the use of Florfenicol and other increasingly strong antibiotics is a matter of significant public interest and concern.
- (6) Understands there is little available science to support such intensive, widespread use of Florfenicol and limited to no understanding of its residual properties and impact on marine ecology.
- (7) Accepts the evidence that antibiotic resistance is a significant global public health threat and that the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in humans, animals and plants is the major driver of antimicrobial resistance.

- (8) Agrees the long-term use of antibiotics by industrial salmon farms is not supported by science or sustainable for marine ecologies.
- (9) Calls on the Government to establish a publicly accessible portal detailing in real-time where, when, and in what quantities antibiotics are being used in Tasmanian fish farms so the public, recreational and other commercial fishers can make safe, informed decisions.

It was a little over a year ago that people living on southern beaches and around coastal communities in south-east Tasmania woke up to discover globules of dead and stinking matter, dead fish and other marine creatures on their coastal beaches to their utter horror. What unfolded over coming weeks was a deepening marine crisis, and for the industrial salmon industry, as a bacterium known as *Piscirickettsia salmonis* (*P. salmonis*) killed vast numbers of Atlantic salmon in pens. According to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), that mass mortality event, which happened over February to March last year, and then more mortalities in December of last year, killed around 21,000 fish, or about 4 million Atlantic salmon. It was a horrific environmental event that brought home the reality of industrial finfish farming to coastal communities and to Tasmanians everywhere.

There was a sequence of events that followed. One of the events, which I'll only mention briefly, was captured by Bob Brown Foundation drones over a Huon Aquaculture facility where live fish were seen being stuffed into tubs full of dead fish - an obvious breach of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*. Unfortunately, although we have evidence from our right-to-information enquiries that an *Animal Welfare Act 1993* investigation was initiated, it is still apparently underway, more than a year after live fish were filmed being put into barrels full of dead fish. We've seen no progress whatsoever on that animal-welfare investigation being undertaken by Biosecurity Tasmania.

The cynic in me could suggest that the alleged perpetrator of this breach of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* is too big for this government to take on, because the alleged perpetrator is Huon Aquaculture. I hope to be proven wrong and for that investigation and its results to come to light before too long. There is no doubt whatsoever that fish have suffered, just as there is no doubt whatsoever that cramming up to 25 kilograms per square metre of fish into pens, as we see in the D'Entrecasteaux leases, leads to dreadful animal cruelty.

Those fish have dreadful lives. But what we do know is that as a result of climate change, warming waters and overstocking of industrial fish farm pens, the increase of disease is higher, and the risk of more mortality from piscirickettsiosis continues to be high. Therefore, the industry will continue to try to deal with the problem through increasing the use of antibiotics and seeking to use more of an antibiotic which has never been used in the finfish farming industry before, and that is florfenicol.

It is an agricultural chemical, if you like, that has been principally used to control disease in pigs. That is why Huon Aquaculture sought to use florfenicol off-label as it dealt with alarming numbers of fish deaths, the impact on their business, the impact on trade, but critically for everyday Tasmanians, the impact on our marine environment.

**Ms Forrest** - Pigs don't live in the marine environment, last time I checked.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Pigs do not live in the marine environment; that is a very accurate observation, honourable member for Murchison.

I just want to take honourable members through a short timeline of what has happened since that mass-mortality event, noting that in recent weeks the permit that was granted by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to the salmon industry in Tasmania has been suspended. I'll go into a bit more detail on that, but principally because of the unacceptable risk of the use of florfenicol to our trading export industries.

On 18 February 2025, Salmon Tasmania confirmed with Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) vet rep Stuart Bowman that florfenicol can be used off-label through use of the APVMA-approved pure active ingredient compounded and prescribed by a vet. We've got right-to-information documents that show the back and forth, particularly between Huon Aquaculture and officers in NRE and Biosecurity Tasmania. You could see, and it's hardly so surprising given the history here, that at that point NRE and Biosecurity Tasmania, but particularly NRE, was almost tripping over itself to help Huon. Particularly to be able to top-coat feed with florfenicol is the way it's given to the fish.

A couple of weeks later, there was correspondence between our Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry about florfenicol and its antimicrobial importance rating - noting the impact of the use of florfenicol on antimicrobial resistance, which is where its potential impact on human health becomes particularly relevant.

On 15 April last year, the Chief Veterinary Officer asked a representative from Salmon Tasmania to research and provide information on the pathway for Australian use of florfenicol for salmon. The Chief Veterinary Officer was advised that florfenicol can be used off-label, and that progressing a minor-use permit for florfenicol or adding salmon to an existing registered florfenicol product is the preferred longer-term approach. Salmon Tasmania was progressing an application for a minor-use permit.

I will just pause here for a moment to remind honourable members that, in the first three applications of florfenicol, from 26 November last year and 9 January this year, it was made known that 815 kilograms of florfenicol had been dumped into Tasmanian waters - that is nearly a tonne of antibiotics. We know that the dumping continued after 9 January, so it is likely to be a significantly higher number now, up until the point where the permit was suspended.

On 30 June last year there are some minutes from the Joint Salmonid Industry Health Group reiterating that off-label use is possible. When we talk about off-label use: an application was made, ultimately, by an organisation called AbbeyFlor, on behalf of the Tasmanian salmon industry, for the use of florfenicol in marine operations, and at that point, it was only registered under the APVMA for the treatment of respiratory disease in pigs, and any other use would be off-label. This is not a loophole; we're not suggesting that this is some loophole that's been exploited. It is simply that it was known that it was possible to use it without getting an APVMA permit.

Sometime in July 2025, the program of environmental monitoring of florfenicol in salmon aquaculture marine sites was developed and that work was being led by the Environment Protection Authority. On 4 August last year, there was an agenda paper from the Salmon Industry Working Group where the recommendation was that:

Government takes the lead in proactively communicating the importance of florfenicol use, for the management of *P. Salmonis*, to the broader community.

Again, this is the salmon industry effectively telling the government what to do; we have a long and sorry history of that here in Tasmania, too. Species like the Maugean skate will pay an eternal price for it.

On 28 July last year, Huon Aquaculture wrote to government, to NRE, to indicate that it planned to use florfenicol off-label in coming weeks; this was without seeking a federal permit to use it, but to use it through the off-label provisions under the prescription of a veterinarian. This certainly ruffled some normally quite smooth feathers in government, because Huon Aquaculture was effectively saying: we are going to do it. There was a phone call on the morning of 4 August between Huon and the Chief Veterinary Officer, an email was sent from Huon informing NRE Tas of the intention to administer an unknown quantity of florfenicol into its Zuidpool North lease, at an unknown date. On 5 August, the following day, Salmon Tasmania's CEO, John Whittington - how far he has fallen since he ran DPIPW - but also the secretary of NRE, Jason Jacobi, and Catherine Murdoch, the CEO of the Environment Protection Authority, had a meeting with industry representatives in which a paper, drafted on 25 July, titled Environmental Monitoring of Florfenicol in Salmon Aquaculture Marine Sites, was discussed.

There's back and forth again between the Chief Veterinary Officer and Huon about the intention to use florfenicol in August. The following day, the 7th, the Chief Veterinary Officer received a phone call from Huon's vet, who was concerned about more increased mortalities due to *P. salmonis*, and the vet informed the acting CVO that of the daily mortalities, 60 per cent were attributed to *P. salmonis* compared to the usual level of 20 per cent. The vet was concerned about the amount of *P. salmonis* being shed into pens and how the fish would cope with upcoming warmer water temperatures. I will just pause here to note that respected IMAS scientist Stewart Frusher, in response to the decision to suspend the permit, said:

We are essentially at the stage where waters in south-eastern Tasmania aren't fit for purpose for salmon.

That is simply a fact of warming waters.

On 13 August, Huon requested support of the Chief Veterinary Officer for an emergency-use application of florfenicol, and then a consultant to the industry, Nautilus Collaboration, asked the Chief Veterinary Officer for a letter of support for emergency use in Tasmania. On that same day, Biosecurity Tasmania received notification that the florfenicol treatment would be delayed until the end of August so that environmental monitoring conditions could be considered and an emergency permit applied for.

This is just an example. I understand, if you're a salmon industry CEO and you're looking at this volume of death, that there is panic and you're trying to take panic-mitigating measures in order to save your business; but we're talking about an antibiotic that had never been used in the marine environment before, and you've got Huon Aquaculture pushing government hard to allow it to be used off-label. But on 14 August, the day after he was asked, the acting Chief Veterinary Officer provided a letter of support for Huon's emergency permit application to the

APVMA. On that same day, on 14 August, crossbench members were informed of the winter *P. salmonis* event.

Now, the last people often to know about what's happening with this industry, where and when and how much antibiotics are being used, is not the crossbench; it's the Tasmanian people. That is why the punchline, if you like, of this notice of motion is about being able to provide everyday Tasmanians with readily accessible information that tells them where these antibiotics have been released into marine waters, and allows them to make some informed choices, because at the moment they are largely kept in the dark.

There was then a public announcement, after the crossbench had been told, and after all this manoeuvring behind the scenes, and MPs were told that there had been mortalities, that this was a winter event - highly, highly irregular, given that the waters are supposed to be cooler. Salmon Tasmania denied that there'd been a mass-mortality event occurring, and then minister Pearce stated that the industry would be compelled to provide information on the disease level across the state. Three days later, a salmon moratorium was announced.

It was pleasing and slightly unusual for us to see correspondence from the secretary of NRE Tasmania containing copies of notices sent to salmon companies - compelling information regarding stocking densities and the extent of the disease.

We do know that an application will be made for the use of florfenicol at Okehampton Bay, which is right there on the edge of some of the richest and most diverse recreational and commercial fishing waters in Tasmania.

So, what happened? Thankfully, and it's only a temporary reprieve, of course, the Department of Forestry and Fisheries and APVMA wrote to the salmon industry and effectively said, 'You've provided insufficient evidence to support your emergency permit'.

Then we had something quite unique happen: we had NRE Tasmania, Biosecurity Tasmania and the Environment Protection Authority start to muscle up on behalf of the marine environment. That is partly because the monitoring and testing program that had been undertaken identified the antibiotic florfenicol in species including rock lobster, abalone, whelk and urchins up to 10 kilometres away from where the florfenicol had been used in the pens.

There's clearly an impact on other commercial fisheries, but also obviously an impact on wild fisheries and the marine environment. Remembering that when the florfenicol was used, from memory, Public Health advised recreational fishers that if they were concerned, they should not eat fish caught within 3 kilometres of a site where florfenicol had been used. Therefore, Public Health is saying, 'Look, you might be a bit concerned, so we would simply advise you not to catch and eat fish within a 3-kilometre radius of the pens,' but the science, the monitoring, found that the antibiotic - and of course it did - had moved through the water column and was found in other marine species.

Obviously that had a very significant and chilling effect on commercial fisheries, including abalone and rock lobster. It was interesting to see what choices were made about which fisheries you act to protect, because once the florfenicol decision was made and that antibiotic was being top-coated onto feed, there had to be a closure of the rock lobster fishery. Recreational fishers weren't able to catch fish where they had before. It had an impact on other commercial fisheries that was tangibly financially negative.

**Ms Webb** - Talk about picking winners.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Talk about picking winners. Big salmon wins again. Thank you for your interjection, member for Nelson.

These bedrock industries that we've had here in Tasmania for the longest time, we can have debates about how sustainable or not they've been in the past and today, but the rock lobster fishery, the abalone fishery, they are bedrock export industries for this island, all over the island.

But a decision was made because the pressure was coming on so hard, particularly from Huon, to use an antibiotic that had never been used in the marine environment before, that was registered to be used for pigs. That pressure was obviously impossible for the Tasmanian government at that time to ignore.

**Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.**

## **RECOGNITION OF VISITORS**

[2.31 p.m.]

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Honourable members, before we go on to our questions today, I'd like to give a very warm welcome to our Chamber and to our parliament, to the delegates from our twin parliament, the Legislative Assembly of Samoa. We have a delegation here led by the Honourable Mr Speaker, a number of members of parliament who are chairs and vice-chairs of various parliamentary committees, and two senior parliamentary officials - the Deputy Clerk and the Manager of Institutional Strengthening Services.

They're joining us as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Australia-Pacific Twinning Program, which is an important program that we've been participating in for a number of years. The concept of the parliamentary twinning is similar to a sister city relationship. Each state and territory is twinned with a Pacific parliament. I think we won the lottery - we have Samoa and we're very grateful for that.

The twinning arrangement, relationships, and programs support the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's goals and objectives, such as strengthening parliaments to uphold and strengthen parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, sustainable development and human rights, and also encourage mutual learning, dialogue, cooperation and networking across the Commonwealth to build strong, powerful and effective parliamentary institutions that are able to respond and adapt to the challenges for today and tomorrow.

The program has many engaging and diverse sessions planned for our guests because it looks like they'll probably be spending quite a bit of time indoors for the week, including plenty of opportunities for our members here to engage and socialise with our delegates. I would encourage everyone here to take the time to say hello and have a chat with our delegates and make sure that they enjoy their time in Tasmania. Some are here for the very first time and are planning a return excursion. I know that all members in this Chamber will make you very welcome and any questions or anything you need to know, please feel free to engage with our members.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Public School Bus Services**

**Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT**

[2.34 p.m.]

My question is regarding the matter of the provision of reliable school bus services. This is one I put to you, which you took on notice recently. Following the recent successful two-year campaign by a Gagebrook teenager to secure Friday bus services for his journey to school in Bridgewater, minister, is it government policy to provide reliable five-day bus services on school routes?

Can you please detail how many current school bus routes which primarily service state public schools do not have a reliable five-day-week bus service, but instead require students to find alternative transport options for at least one day per week?

Lastly, can you please explain why it is that there are school bus routes which do not provide a reliable five-day-per-week service for school students?

### **ANSWER**

Thank you for the question and we have a bit of information here. Before that, I'd just like to welcome you to the Chamber. It's always good to see guests here and I hope we don't do anything wrong in our proceedings that you can chastise the President on later.

The Department of State Growth contracts with approximately 90 bus operators to deliver over 300 school bus and specialist school bus services. The service eligibility guidelines for school bus services, established under the *Passenger Transport Services Act 2011*, determine when services are to be contracted and how school bus routes and timetables are designed.

State Growth works closely with bus operators and the Department for Education, Children and Young People to monitor student capacity and demand on both the school and general access school bus network and various contracts where appropriate. School bus services are designed to provide regular services within intake areas, primarily for public school students on weekdays during school terms.

In addition to school bus services, State Growth contracts general access services across the state. These are designed to provide services for the broader community to travel for work, school and recreation.

Metro Tasmania operates both dedicated school bus services and general access services, some of which connect with schools and provide a transport option for students.

The particular service in your question is one of the latter and is not a dedicated school bus service. Weekday general access services provided by Metro currently operate according to Monday to Thursday and Friday timetables. The origin of this difference is there are more services operated by Metro on Friday evenings.

However, since Metro introduced temporary service adjustments in August 2023 in response to driver shortages, some Friday services were suspended even though they otherwise operated Monday to Thursday. Since August 2023, Metro has returned some suspended trips within their existing operational capacity.

We are working towards more consistent Monday to Friday timetables as part of phase 2 of the Greater Hobart Bus Network Review.

### **Public School Bus Services**

**Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT**

[2.37 p.m.]

Just to follow up on that, and I thank the Deputy Leader for his answer, but I don't think it went to the intent of my question, though. The natural flow-on from my question is for those routes that you've identified then as general access routes, which are also purposed for school bus pickups on a regular and understood basis.

Are there any other of those that remain only Monday to Thursday then? Have you done an audit subsequent to young Jack's advocacy in Bridgewater? Have you done an audit to see if there are any of those known general access/school bus services that are only four days a week?

### **ANSWER**

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you for clarification on that point. I do not know of the audit. I will follow up on that just to see if there is a specific number. There are no other letters or emails before me that I'm aware of at the moment on questioning those runs, but I will double-check and come back to you on that.

**Ms Webb** - I appreciate that, thank you.

### **Neighbourhood Houses - Needs Analysis**

**Ms FORREST question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY**

[2.38 p.m.]

Recognising that Neighbourhood Houses are increasingly stretched, are relied on for central community infrastructure, face growing safety pressures and, noting the minister's commitment in November last year to undertake a needs analysis across the network, can the relevant minister provide an update on where this process is up to?

## ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. *Talofa*, a huge welcome to our Samoan visitors. I look forward to more catching up.

The answer to the question: a procurement process is underway to appoint a consultant and determine the procedures for Neighbourhood Houses to participate. Applications from consultants closed on 12 March 2026 and the Department of Premier and Cabinet will then undertake a process to identify the preferred consultant to commence the needs analysis.

### **Metro Bus Services - Investment**

#### **Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT**

[2.39 p.m.]

The war on Iran and its surrounds is starting to have a significant effect on the household budgets of Tasmanians. With the petrol price skyrocketing and set to climb higher, the cost to move around our city and buy basics is going up. I'm sure we can all agree on that. Our buses are also starting to fill up.

Tasmania's public transport system is a logical place for government investment when there's such pressure on petrol prices, because of events beyond the state's control. We've established that the temporary adjustment by Metro in August 2023 saw 177 services cut, and later we were told 120 of those services had been permanently cut. It wasn't a temporary adjustment, and that is across the Hobart network.

Would you support Tasmanians to meet their already-stretched budget and invest in our lagging bus system? Will you commit to reinstating the cancelled services, or at least reinstating services in areas of need to ensure Tasmanians can get to work on time? Will you consider new routes to areas currently not well serviced? Finally, will you commit to working harder to invest in recruiting, training and retaining Metro bus drivers?

## ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. Very appropriate timing, of course, and I can certainly commit to working harder. I don't think anybody who knows me would ever challenge my commitment to working hard for all of Tasmania.

In relation to the bus system, we are already doing half-price bus fares, and that's not the complete answer, but it has been quite interesting outside of the fuel crisis that we're in at the moment.

We didn't see much of an uplift in the Metro services, but what we did see was a significant uplift in people travelling between Launceston and Hobart, or Swansea and Triabunna, Bicheno to Hobart, and areas like that, or Huon up, because the cost variation was a lot greater. So, there was a learning curve in that for us. All of these things are being discussed as we speak, and there are members of the team who are meeting daily to run the numbers on what we need to do and how we need to do it. I'm sure those are different -

**Ms O'Connor** - On Metro or the buses generally?

**Mr VINCENT** - Metro and buses as a whole, thank you. Yes, that's what I'm referring to.

In relation to the driver retention, last year there were two or three intake programs. What they've found on previous programs since the shortage, was that a lot of people would sign up, and I'm not sure of the exact numbers, but a significant number would drop out during the course, or fail to take up the role. In the last two or three courses that happened, which was about the time I came into the role, they had just finished doing one. I know they were doing another because I knew a couple of people in that intake. The uptake of those drivers and the one they had just a few months ago has been extremely high. So, they are well in front of where they need to be to carry the present workload of routes.

State Growth is working through, with Metro and other service providers, how the public transport system can be a lot better. Some of those 120 services that have been deleted were runs that ended up being a bit like a spider, all over the place. The efficiency wasn't there for people to get to their destinations in a timely manner, because we were stopping and starting like this. In amongst that review was the methodology of saying: how can we make these bus routes and the review better for being streamlined to get to where we have to go efficiently, but in positions for more people to come on board?

There are several parts of the question that you asked, but all of those lead to a situation that has been forced on us now because of the cost of fuel. The fuel situation is okay at the moment, but every one of us is concerned about what happens in the not-too-distant future of a month or so. They are working quite quickly and there may be announcements coming up shortly. I'd like to think of how they will review those runs and make efficiencies for being able to use the public transport system better, especially in and around Launceston, Burnie and Hobart, where Metro operates. There is an enormous amount of work being done on all those different areas that you asked the question on.

### **Neighbourhood Houses - Needs Analysis**

**Ms THOMAS question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY**

[2.45 p.m.]

Further to the question the member for Murchison asked in relation to the Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania network review, I have some questions. The government's commitment made in November last year was that the needs analysis would get underway early next year. It's now nearly the end of March and the work on the actual needs analysis still has not yet commenced, as we've just heard. Are you able to explain what is the reason for the delay, and can Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania be assured the review will be completed in time to inform its community budget submission to the 2027-28 state budget process?

**ANSWER**

Thank you, Mr President.

- (1) A procurement process is underway to appoint an independent consultant to undertake the Neighbourhood Houses network needs analysis. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) has provided a written update to Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and network houses regarding this process, and the process is well underway.
- (2) DPAC sought and received feedback from Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania regarding the specification for this procurement, which is being delivered in line with requirements under the Treasurer's Instructions.
- (3) The government will not seek to rush or pre-empt an outcome by the independent consultant who is to be appointed. It's expected the needs analysis will be thorough and provide clear understanding to government of what is required within the network more broadly.

### **Ashley Youth Detention Centre - Geographic Breakdown of Detainees**

#### **Ms ARMITAGE question to MINISTER for CHILDREN and YOUTH, Ms PALMER**

[2.47 p.m.]

Mr President, *talofa lava* to our guests and welcome. It's very nice to see you here; it's unfortunate about the weather and hopefully you might have a chance to visit some other areas of the state while you're here.

**Ms Rattray** - I think that means north.

**Ms Forrest** - It means north-west.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Just other parts that might be a little sunnier and maybe not quite so wet, but certainly not foggy.

I have two questions. The first question is: can the minister please advise the number of residents at Ashley Youth Detention Centre on a weekly basis by geographic location - that is north, north-west and south - for the previous six months?

#### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for the question and welcome to our lovely guests here today. In answer to the question posed by the honourable member, first, I need to advise that to ensure that no child or young person in custodial youth detention can be identified, the Department for Education, Children and Young People withholds the release of data values under five. Therefore, some data values have been presented as an aggregated figure to maintain the confidentiality of children and young people. The number of young people in Ashley Youth Detention Centre can change daily, subject to admissions and discharges, and therefore the figures reported represent a daily average each week over the last six months.

Mr President, as part of this answer, I seek leave to table a document and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Leave granted; document tabled and incorporated.**

**See Appendix 1 (page 126).**

The document that I will be tabling outlines the average number of residents at Ashley Youth Detention Centre on a weekly basis by northern and southern geographic regions from September 2026 to the end of February 2026 - that's combining the north and the north-west into the northern region, and then the southern region.

### **Risdon Prison - Breakdown of Number of Inmates by Gender and Geographic Region**

**Ms ARMITAGE question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY**

[2.50 p.m.]

Can the Leader please advise the number of inmates at Risdon Prison, including the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison, on a monthly basis by geographic location - that is north, north-west and south - for the previous six months?

**ANSWER**

Mr President, I seek leave to table the monthly offender numbers for Risdon Prison, including the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison, based on geographical location, and have it incorporated into *Hansard* as it is a table. I trust that is satisfactory to the member.

**Leave granted; document tabled and incorporated.**

**See Appendix 2 (page 127).**

### **Corporate Visits to Schools - Tassal**

**Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER**

[2.51 p.m.]

Minister, what is the current education department policy regarding access of corporate businesses to our state schools, including to primary schools and secondary schools?

Further, are you aware of a recent instance where Tassal staff visited Geeveston Primary School in February this year to discuss that business's Little Bites Big Future program?

Can you please detail whether and if so, what approvals were sought for this corporate visit, including whether parental approval for photographs to be taken and subsequently released on the company's social media platform was given?

Can you guarantee that should community groups, community NGO groups such as Environment Tasmania or the local group Neighbours of Fish Farms, also seek to visit our primary or secondary schools, they would be provided the same access as representatives of the salmon industry?

## **ANSWER**

Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the member for the question. I am aware that external programs may be offered in schools, including initiatives delivered by industry, community organisations, sporting clubs and specialist providers in accordance with the Department for Education, Children and Young People Partnering with External Organisations policy and Partnering with External Organisations Procedure. This policy and procedure provide clear guidance on the requirements and expectations of programs and services offered by external organisations to schools.

External providers do not have an automatic right to access school sites. Principals are best placed to determine whether a proposed program aligns with the requirement outlined in the policy and the procedure, whether their school has the capacity to participate and how the program fits within the local context and the needs of their students. Schools are expected to communicate with families regarding participation in such activities and parents and carers may choose to opt their child out if they wish.

I'm advised that Tassal's Little Bites, Big Futures program has not been involved in any schools in 2026.

### **Corporate Visits to Schools - Tassal**

#### **Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER**

[2.53 p.m.]

Just to follow up on that, Mr President, because I believe that it was shared on social media that they were involved in Geeveston Primary School in February this year. Are you able to follow up to see whether that's information you've been provided incorrectly, please minister?

## **ANSWER**

Thank you, Mr President. Yes, I can certainly follow that up. But as I say, the advice given to me is that the program has not been involved in any schools in 2026. But I will follow that up and get back to you.

### **Fuel and Gas Supplies**

#### **Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT**

[2.54 p.m.]

Minister, as you know, there is a massive fuel shock happening around the world and that places an island like Tasmania, which is heavily dependent on imported oil and gas particularly. Are you able to update the Council on any briefings, plans or projects that will help us be less reliant on imported fossil fuels, but also deal with the immediate issues this state - perhaps

more so than any other state, because of our distance - is facing in relation to access to fossil fuels?

## **ANSWER**

Yes, a very relevant question with the pressures that are on us all at the moment. I wouldn't like to go into details on some of the things that are being discussed, but I could say that it is being discussed on a daily basis both internally and with major stakeholders throughout Tasmania and nationally.

**Ms O'Connor** - When you say major stakeholders - the Tasmanian community car drivers would be a major stakeholder, so any detail you can provide.

**Mr VINCENT** - There is a group, I think they met, I stand to be corrected, Monday night or last Monday night, it might have been. There were 12 of the first one a week ago. There were 40 different bodies representing a very broad section of the community, from drivers to peak bodies and everybody else that's involved, because you can imagine it is affecting truck drivers and everything. A lot of discussions are taking place at a very high level, both here within Tasmania and regular communication. The Prime Minister, I understand, has been part of those conversations as well as Mr Bowen on what needs to happen. I don't have further details on specifics, but as soon as they are available, I will be certainly happy to present them to the House.

## **ANSWER TO QUESTION**

### **Child and Youth Safety Standards - Tasmania Police**

[2.56 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, on indulgence, I have an answer to a question asked by the member for Hobart to the Minister for Children and Youth that fell outside the minister's portfolio, and the following answer has been provided by the minister for Justice. Do I have your indulgence?

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Yes, you have the Floor.

**Ms RATTRAY** - The government thanks the member for Hobart for raising this matter on 18 March 2026 and is aware of a technical anomaly under the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023*, where Tasmania Police are not captured by the Child and Youth Safe Standards and the reportable conduct scheme. This anomaly means that while the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management was captured by the standards and the scheme, this did not automatically extend to Tasmania Police. The government is taking action to resolve this issue by prescribing the police service under the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Amendment Regulations of 2026. The amendment regulations explicitly provide that the police service is captured by the Child and Youth Safe Standards and the reportable conduct scheme. The amendment regulations will be gazetted within the next week. For completeness, further legislative amendments will be made in a relevant bill later this year.

The government thanks the Independent Regulator. I can confirm that the Independent Regulator's recommendation to ensure that the change to the legislation applies from August

2025 will be considered by the government in the process of preparing the further legislative amendments. Again, I thank the member.

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Hobart) - If this is a supplementary question, or perhaps if the Leader for the Government could come back in later and provide some sort of timeline on the development of that regulation, that would be most helpful.

**Ms RATTRAY** - In response to that, the amendment regulations will be gazetted within the next week, but there will be an amendment to the act.

**Ms O'Connor** - You are still considering the implementation.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Later this year, but I will get you a firmer timeline.

## MOTION

### Florfenicol Use in Tasmania

**Resumed from above (page 33)**

[2.59 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr President. Before the break I was taking members through some of the history of the use of florfenicol in the marine environment. I guess the question it raises is: why does it matter? Why does it matter that the salmon industry, for many years, before applying for florfenicol to pens, has been using large doses of oxytetracycline on finfish in pens as well? Well, it matters because of something called antibiotic microbial resistance. Obviously, I am not a scientist, but I do talk to them from time to time. In the *Journal of Public Health* in December 2015, an editorial was produced which said:

The World Health Organization called antimicrobial resistance 'an increasingly serious threat to global public health that requires action across all government sectors and society.'

The editorial says:

There is growing evidence that antibiotic resistance in humans is promoted by the widespread use of nontherapeutic antibiotics in animals ...

The practice of medicine and the state of public health would be catastrophically affected if antibiotics were not generally effective ...

**Ms Forrest** - It would take us back to the dark ages, that's what it would do.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It certainly would. Small infections that could kill you, basically because of the misuse of antibiotics and the creation of bacteria that are resistant to any antibiotic treatment.

The Food & Water Watch institute in Washington D.C. has a paper out, a 26 April Issue Brief, that says:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that over 2 million Americans contract an antibiotic-resistant infection each year, leading to at least 23,000 deaths.

This was in a paper that was produced 10 years ago. The Issue Brief continues:

But fewer people realize that the aquaculture industry also has an antibiotics problem. Just like raising livestock and poultry, many large-scale fish farming operations rely on the misuse and overuse of antibiotics to compensate for crowded, stressful conditions.

The Issue Brief asks:

So what happens when antibiotics are used in aquaculture? Treating the fish with medicated feed creates conditions in which antibiotic-resistant bacteria can spread within the fish. This treatment also creates the possibility of drug residues in seafood ...

But the fish do not eat all of the medicated feed, and most of the antibiotics pass through the digestive system and are released into the environment in animal waste. Antibiotics that remain in the water place selective pressure on bacteria living in it, leading to the development and spread of antibiotic resistance near aquaculture facilities. Prophylactic use of antibiotics in shrimp and salmon aquaculture has led to higher rates of resistance in bacteria in the surrounding waters. Additionally, antibiotics in the water affect other marine life nearby.

Evidence suggests that these antibiotic-resistant bacteria can, in turn, pass on their antibiotic resistance genes to other bacteria, including human and animal pathogens, through horizontal gene transfer. An increasing number of studies have documented elevated levels of bacterial antibiotic resistance in and around aquaculture sites. For example, before 1990 in the United Kingdom, the disease-causing bacteria *Aeromonas salmonicida* were sensitive to amoxicillin. But after the antibiotic was introduced to fish farms, amoxicillin-resistant strains began to appear. Evidence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria also has been reported in the Mediterranean Sea, where a study found a high percentage of resistant strains, indicating a widespread antibiotic resistance in the bacterial populations surrounding fish farms.

There is a comparison between salmon farms in Norway and Chile. I'd love to see a comparison between our application of antibiotics here and a country like Norway. Chilean salmon producers use about 840 times more antibiotics per tonne of fish than Norwegian salmon producers, which are focused on vaccines and destocking, so lowering the density of the pens to mitigate the risk of disease spread.

The heavy use of antibiotics in Chilean salmon facilities has led to an increase of antibiotic-resistant bacteria there ... Antibiotic-resistance genes that emerged in aquatic bacteria have been found in human and animal pathogens nearby. For example, some antibiotic-resistant urinary tract

infections in Chilean people have been linked to antibiotic misuse in salmon aquaculture ...

- and this is a referenced statement.

Research suggests that aquaculture workers may be at risk as well.

Just bear with me for a moment while I find a very good piece of work undertaken by Dr Frank Nicklason and Dr Lisa Gershwin. This was in relation to concerns about antibiotic residues in wild lobsters and abalone.

This hasn't been published by the *Mercury*. It was sent into the *Mercury* as an opinion piece and unfortunately the *Mercury* decided not to publish it, even though this is a matter of very significant public interest. It said:

What is antibiotic resistance and why should we care?

They ask.

Eating salmon with antibiotic traces doesn't affect most people immediately, so some may wonder what's the problem.

Our concern is the antibiotic-induced changes to the bacteria that live naturally in our bodies and the knock-on effects if we get an infection requiring treatment. Exposure to microdoses of antibiotics promotes evolution of resistance and reduced effectiveness.

Use of antibiotics in food production induces changes to bacterial populations which are difficult to eradicate and cause people real harm.

When antibiotics are applied to kill off bacteria, a few of the hardest inevitably survive. Those that survive become the breeders for the next generation and with each application of antibiotics.

This is not speculative and it doesn't happen sometimes, this is the rule, not the exception.

Antibiotic resistance happens here in Tasmania. People undergoing chemotherapy and joint replacements often require antibiotics.

Infections like pneumonia are lethal without effective antibiotics.

In the pre-antibiotic era -

This is what the honourable member for Murchison was referring to earlier, by interjection.

- parents expected to lose children to infections. Today, antibiotic resistance threatens to render these crucial drugs ineffective.

They ask:

Why are antibiotics in waterways so worrisome? Well, when a land animal is given antibiotic in its feed, it eats most of it. When the animal defecates, the antibiotics stay mostly contained within the faeces. Antibiotics used in fish farms and hatcheries have a different fate. When antibiotics are top-coated onto fish feed, most does not make it into the fish and when ingested they pass into the water. Antibiotics persist in sediments for months. Antibiotics released from sediments may be consumed by wild fish, potentially affecting them and us.

That is a huge issue looming here in Tasmania with the further application for a permit for florfenicol.

In early March this year, after asking the salmon companies for a bit more information on the effect of their florfenicol application, APVMA, the national regulatory body, suspended the permit that had been granted, which was due to run until 31 August this year. They stated that this was because the application of florfenicol in marine waters in Tasmania, in the current gap of knowledge about the impact here, in Tasmanian-specific circumstances, was an unacceptable risk. That unacceptable risk, as I said earlier, through the regulator's mind, was to our seafood trade industries.

Given that monitoring found florfenicol in other species, wild fish up to 10 kilometres away, there is also an argument - and a pretty strong one, I'd have thought - that there is a significant ecological risk from the ongoing heavy use of antibiotics, whether they be oxytetracycline or florfenicol. Now you can be absolutely sure that the dosing of other antibiotics into fish pens is continuing despite the fact that the federal regulator has pulled the permit for florfenicol.

What we know is that the industry, whose spokesperson John Whittington, said that, 'The use of florfenicol is a really safe and effective antibiotic', with no evidence to back that up at all, other than the fact that it's being used in excess in Chile, we know that the salmon industry, which believes it is a really safe and effective antibiotic, plans to apply for a permanent permit for the use of florfenicol. It wouldn't just be a minor use permit or an emergency permit, which was what was being discussed last year. It would be working with the APVMA in order to have a permanent right to dose fish pens with florfenicol.

The issue with that is that we don't know the impact. We don't know whether it will be effective in dealing with *Piscirickettsia salmonis*. We don't know what impact it will have on the marine ecology. We don't know what impact that will have on other species in the marine environment, including rock lobsters and abalone. We do know that that antibiotic has been found in them. We don't know what impact, for example, that would have on our exports, given how important those bedrock marine industries are to Tasmania. Finally, we don't know, but we suspect, that the impact on the Tasmanian clean and green brand would be tarnished once again.

What do the people of Tasmania need? Well, just for a change, maximum transparency would be terrific. Making sure that our regulatory bodies and government agencies continue to show the same sort of concern around this issue, as they did when they wrote to the APVMA about the florfenicol permit. This is after having supported the industry initially and having identified this substance up to 10 kilometres away from the pens. NRE Tasmania, Biosecurity

Tasmania and the Environment Protection Authority wrote to the federal regulator in a damning letter, signed off by Jason Jacobi, and said:

In relation to health data, the previous application stated that 'florfenicol safety is well established'. The applicant does not substantiate this statement, only referring to the minor use permit that expired in 2013. In relation to metabolism and kinetic data, the previous application stated that 'application of data from other food producing species sufficed'.

I gather they were looking at the pig data to say it was a safe and effective product to use in our marine environment.

In relation to environmental assessment, the previous application stated that such data were not included because quote 'existing data on florfenicol covers environmental risks for the proposed use'. The applicant provides no reference to such data that are directly relevant to the Tasmanian environment. In relation to antibiotic resistance, the previous application stated that such a consideration was not applicable to the application.

This is the application for a permit made following last year's mass mortality event. After Huon had initially said to NRE that they were going to start using it within a fortnight regardless.

Then there was an application to the federal regulator. The combined agencies are commenting on that application, and the lack of robustness, or reference to anything credible or scientific. The brief to APVMA goes on to say:

The rationales for these statements in the previous application were limited. There is public and scientific interest in florfenicol use in aquaculture, including consideration of matters such as human health, antibiotic resistance, environment and ecology. Regardless of whether or not florfenicol causes harm in these domains, there is a concern that neither the current nor the previous application -

The current application we're talking about here is the application to apply for florfenicol at Okehampton Bay and that was current as at November last year.

- provides considered and robust evidence, relevant to Tasmanian circumstances, to address these matters. Where relevant evidence is unavailable, as may sometimes be the case, this too should be acknowledged and guide conditions that may be applied.

They note that:

Laboratory results have started to come in, the residue monitoring program remains far from complete.

It says:

For the first large-scale usage of florfenicol to treat salmon in Tasmania, the EPA has specified an extensive residue monitoring program, including

sampling of water, sediments and wild fish at internal, external and reference sites before, during and after florfenicol treatment to collect data to support environmental and human health risk assessments in the Tasmanian context.

I suspect that as a result of that brief that was sent to the federal regulator by Tasmanian authorities in response to the notion of using florfenicol in Okehampton Bay that the federal regulator - which had already asked the salmon industry for more information - felt even more able to confidently suspend the permit.

So, back to the original question about what the Tasmanian people need. The Tasmanian people need this government to stop collapsing to the salmon industry every time they make a request, to stop facilitating some of their worst excesses. They need the Tasmanian government to start being open and transparent about this industry. It has never been so and it is people who live in coastal communities, people who care about the marine environment, organisations like Neighbours of Fish Farming (NOFF), Bob Brown Foundation, little community groups everywhere, who are being treated with disdain and being kept in the dark.

There's a threshold issue here. Those coastal waters do not belong to the salmon industry and they do not belong to the Tasmanian government. Arguably they belong to the Palawa people of Tasmania, but they're certainly shared public waterways, and that brings with it a special responsibility and obligation on people who profit from those shared coastal waterways and governments that regulate, in one way or another, the activities of those industries.

If there was more transparency about the way this industry is operating, more transparency about what it's putting in the water, that would be a good thing for sure, but the Tasmanian government should also be saying to the industry here, you need to modernise, you need to explore vaccines, wider use of vaccines. You need to lower the density within your pens. Perhaps you should go over and have a look at finfish farming in Norway, where they have very low use of antibiotics, much less stocking density in their pens and the widespread use of vaccines to prevent illness among the salmon they farm.

This is another example of this industry calling the shots - calling the shots in public waterways, threatening to release novel antibiotics into the waterways, with government agencies basically saying we're going to do it in two weeks. But it's also an industry that knows that anytime it asks for something from this government, it pretty much will be sure to get it. The only thing I think that led to that permit being suspended was the fact that the EPA, particularly, was undertaking comprehensive monitoring - as it should - outside the pens, to an extent of 10 kilometres, where they found contamination of other fish species. I hope we can agree that the long-term use of antibiotics by industrial salmon farms is not supported by science and is not sustainable for marine ecologies. There may be an argument for some applications of antibiotics in some circumstances, but what's happened here is that a practice which should have been a rare circumstance has become routine, and it enables laziness on the part of industry.

In the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, the stocking density, as I said earlier, is 25 kilograms a cubic metre; that's a lot of fish in a cubic metre. Outside the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, it's 15 kilograms a cubic metre. This government should be saying to industry: destock. It should also be saying to the industry: you're going have to look at other places to conduct your

operations, because these waters are obviously warming, and there is obviously a higher disease risk to your highly stressed fish.

We think the Tasmanian government needs to speak up soon about the results of its investigation under the *Animal Welfare Act* into Huon Aquaculture for disposing of live fish into bins full of dead fish; but at a bare minimum, while all of this is taking place, the government should establish a publicly accessible portal detailing in real time where, when and in what quantities antibiotics are being used in Tasmanian fish farms, so the public, recreational and other commercial fishers can make safe, informed decisions.

I believe a lot of people in Hobart, the community I'm very proud to represent, would be a bit mortified to know that there's been a large dispersal of antibiotics into the hatcheries up the Derwent; and so, not only are we drinking water that's had a lot of fish poo in it - good on TasWater for their amazing treatment tech - but we're also drinking water that has had oxytetracycline put into it by the salmon industry. Most people in and around this city wouldn't know that. They're kept in the dark, and it's deliberate.

So we're calling on the government to be more transparent, be more open about this, recognise that this is a matter of very significant public interest, it's a matter that impacts on human health and marine and aquatic ecologies. The Tasmanian government is the regulator, the people of Tasmania are the major stakeholder, and they are entitled to have better information presented to them by government through its agencies, but also by the salmon industry, which needs to understand it's losing its social licence. There's huge, huge concern about the use of antibiotics to treat diseases in salmon; huge concern, and rightly so because there's so much that we don't fully understand.

I'm very glad to have brought this issue to Council members' attention; it won't be the last time that we talk about it. I encourage members to keep an eye on the industry and the activities of the federal regulator, as I'm absolutely certain that there is frantic work going on behind the scenes right now to enable the industry to use florfenicol on a permanent basis, and that is not necessarily something that we should all support. I commend the motion.

[2.24 p.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Thanks, Mr President. I'd like to support the motion from the member for Hobart, and I will traverse over some of the information she's already provided because I think I'm going to keep it in context and relevant, but it is also to raise my concern about the scale and the lack of transparency around antibiotic use in Tasmania's salmon aquaculture industry. Just to be really clear: I'm not opposed to salmon farming. Aquaculture is a legitimate and potentially valuable industry for Tasmania, and I accept that a well-managed sustainable salmon or aquaculture sector can have a future here; but the word 'sustainable' carries real meaning in this context, particularly right now, as the evidence would suggest that we are moving further and further away from that standard.

I believe a sustainable industry relies on improving animal health outcomes through better site selection, lower stocking densities, and fish farm management practices designed to reduce the need for interventions like antibiotics in the first place. These are critical considerations. The question this motion puts squarely before us is whether the current trajectory of intensive stocking, mass antibiotic use and opaque reporting is consistent with those principles; and, on the evidence, it's not.

Arguments that this sector is one of the most highly regulated and scrutinised industries in the state - and you will probably hear this from the Leader when she gets up to reply on behalf of the government - hold little weight or credibility if we cannot see what is going on, and information relevant to the health and wellbeing of our native fisheries and human health is not revealed proactively or on an evidence-based footing at all times. The evidence that emerged through budget Estimates was deeply troubling, and the member for Hobart has referred to some of these figures. It is now apparent that more than 815 - or 915, did you say, member for Hobart?

**Ms O'Connor** - 815 as at 9 January this year.

**Ms FORREST** - There's been more since, almost certainly. There was more than 815 kilograms of florfenicol, a broad-spectrum antibiotic that received emergency federal approval for use in Tasmania fairly recently, that was used by salmon companies in south-east Tasmanian waters in the space of just three weeks. That's a lot of antibiotics, as the member for Hobart rightly alluded to, to be put into the waterways in a short period of time.

To be clear about what broad-spectrum antibiotics are: they're not specific. They're broad to kill most things that don't look nice. As people - humans - would know, when you go to your doctor, if they can identify the actual bacterium, assuming it is a bacterium and not a virus that's making you unwell, they will try to specifically prescribe an antibiotic for that bacterium. If they don't know what it is, or they haven't got time to figure out exactly what it is because the nature of the illness is such that it requires immediate treatment, they will use a broad-spectrum antibiotic.

What that does is kill not just the target bacterium, but all your good bacteria in your gut, or lots of them, maybe not all of them, and any other bacteria that may not be making you sick. That's what they do, and let's be clear about that. They're not targeted, narrow-spectrum drugs that target a specific bacterium; they attack and kill a broad range of bacteria, some of which are very good for you. Not all bacteria are bad.

I know the member for Hobart went through this, but I intend to go through it again, and I think we should place on the record the precise circumstances of the approval that was granted. In November 2025, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority, the APVMA, granted an emergency permit for the use of florfenicol in salmon in Tasmania. As the member Hobart said, this was the first time florfenicol had been authorised for aquaculture in Australia. Now, I remember I was at that briefing - it was quite the debacle, I must say, but in any event, it was pretty clear that the industry and the government, as they should be, were very concerned that we were seeing incidents of the bacterium *Piscirickettsia salmonis* - which I will just say as *P. salmonis* now, so we don't have to trip over it every time we say it - was actually occurring in an endemic situation in our waterways, but there was genuine concern about another mass mortality.

This was before the summer really started, when rising temperatures in our water, which happens over summer because it's summer, increase the risk substantially. There was suggestion that it was going to be an early summer, water temperatures would rise more quickly and so there was this desperate rush - and I call it a desperate rush - to approve, as the member for Hobart said, a novel antibiotic that hadn't been used in Tasmania for the aquaculture industry ever - in Australia, not just in Tasmania.

The permit was granted. Well, we didn't know whether there was an outbreak or not. That was unclear at the briefing. It was just a shemozzle as to what was actually going on.

It became apparent that if there wasn't an outbreak, there was definitely concern that there was a *Piscirickettsia salmonis* outbreak or likely outbreak any day soon. But there was also concern that it perhaps had already killed up to 150 metric tonnes of salmon earlier in 2025.

Clearly it was already a problem. We were looking down the barrel in early summer, the temperatures rising in summer and the perfect situation or perfect storm for another mass casualty event.

Of course we don't want to see that. From an animal welfare point of view, we don't want to see that. From a public awareness and seeing dead fish wash up on your beach perspective, we don't want to see that. The industry also doesn't actually want to see that because that's their profit disappearing.

So, the permit was granted. But members should understand what the permit actually authorised. It was not simply a licence to address an immediate crisis. If indeed there was an immediate crisis, that was never actually clear. It enabled the potential deployment of between 5600 and 11,200 kilograms of florfenicol through to August 2026.

To go to the member for Hobart's point, we don't know how much of that up to 11,200 kilograms of florfenicol has been tipped into our waters, and that's the problem. It is one of the problems.

In other words, the 815 kilograms revealed at Estimates and also the information since received up until January was not the ceiling. It wasn't the total amount that could be put in. It was actually just the beginning.

There is a further dimension to this that warrants the serious attention of all members. Documents obtained through right to information and to name those up if you want to go looking for them, RTI 013-2025-26 and RTI 007-2025-26, available on the NRE Tasmania disclosure log, reveal that Tasmanian salmon industry representatives had been advised as early as February 2025 - that's over a year ago and months before the formal emergency application - that florfenicol could potentially be used under veterinary prescription without full APVMA approval. As the member for Hobart said, off licence, when it can be used for pigs under a veterinary prescription and prepared by a vet.

A government official confirmed in writing to Salmon Tasmania that their understanding was correct that florfenicol could be used off-label under a veterinary prescription. No environmental assessment was required. No public consultation was required. No federal oversight. The emergency framing that followed months later deserved scrutiny in that context. There was all this work going on behind the scenes to lead to a different outcome. They wanted to have it permanently listed, effectively.

That moves me on then to the industry's long-term ambition in this space, which was confirmed in Senate Committee hearings recently. I want to draw attention to the evidence given at the federal Senate level because it goes to the heart of what this permit was really all about. Just six weeks ago the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee, on 10 February 2026, and just weeks before the so-called emergency permit was suspended by

the APVMA, the APVMA chief executive, Scott Hansen, gave evidence that I believe is relevant. This is on *Hansard* on page 125; the following exchange took place.

Mr Hansen was asked whether florfenicol was designed to replace oxytetracycline as the product the salmon industry would use. For members' benefit, oxytetracycline is a different family of antibiotics - still broad and still with its own challenges. It would become apparent, particularly at the briefing we had with the minister when we first started raising awareness of it, that it was no longer effective for *Piscirickettsia salmonis*. That's why they were seeking another option. Mr Hansen, in his evidence to the Senate committee, confirmed:

Yes.

He went on further, and in his words in the *Hansard*:

My understanding is that florfenicol is what the salmon industry is wanting. In the first instance, an application for an emergency permit was put in to try to deal with the immediate issue, but we've been told that their long-term ambition is registration of the product and [they are] collecting data as part of these permits to be able to support that application.

To be clear about what he was saying there, he was saying that the emergency permit, the one used to justify the mass deployment of a never-before-used antibiotic in our waters, was, by the APVMA's own CEO's account, partly a data collection exercise in pursuit of permanent registration. The permit was a bit of a Trojan horse, you might say, to suggest that this emergency was the doorway to permanent registration, because full registration was always the desired destination.

Mr Hansen also confirmed that the formal applicant for the permit was not the salmon industry companies themselves, but Abbey Laboratories Pty Ltd, as the member for Hobart alluded to, a structural remove between the industry and the regulatory record that is worth noting.

Mr Hansen added something else. He flagged that full registration would require significantly more information, including about antimicrobial resistance. He made the following observations about why permits, rather than registration, are an appropriate mechanism:

Once a product is registered, the process for removing that registration is quite cumbersome ...

This was the aim of the industry, according to the evidence I was able to look through in various transcripts. If you can get it registered, then it's much, much harder for that registration to be removed unless you don't have access to the antibiotic, to florfenicol. In other words, the APVMA's own CEO was signalling at Senate Estimates on the record that permanent registration of florfenicol would make it substantially harder for regulators to act quickly if problems emerged. The APVMA did act quickly when they decided to act. As we've seen, problems did emerge and the regulator did need to act quickly. And they did.

If we're in a full registration situation, they wouldn't have been able to act that quickly. It's really important to understand this and what the end game really is here. In the same

hearing, Mr Hansen also confirmed something directly relevant to the transparency failures that this motion identifies. He was asked whether the APVMA had any active monitoring role. He was explicit in this, he said:

The APVMA has not been doing the testing. All monitoring sits with the Tasmanian EPA under the permit conditions. The federal body that issued the permit has, in effect, stood back and observed.

Thank goodness for the EPA doing their work. And they did. It's my understanding - when we were at the briefing, the EPA were asked a range of questions about this - that they would monitor the surrounding waters within 5 kilometres to see if there was any rogue, if you like, antibiotics in the waters within 5 kilometres of the pens. They obviously went further and they went to 10 kilometres, which is good and important. It's particularly important when you realise they found residues of florfenicol there. That was enough for the APVMA to act based on the work our own environmental regulator, the Environment Protection Authority, provided.

To return to the amount of florfenicol use in Tasmanian waters, these are not insignificant numbers: 815 kilograms of an antibiotic in three weeks in shared waters - waters that are used by recreational swimmers, recreational fishers and commercial fishers whose livelihoods depend on the health of the marine environment. The reality that should concern every Tasmanian is that we only know this because of parliamentary scrutiny. It hasn't been volunteered and it was not published. People didn't even have the option of making the choice of whether they went into and used those waters. It was extracted through committee processes, the very accountability mechanism that this Council exists to exercise.

**Ms O'Connor** - And right to information.

**Ms FORREST** - Yes, there was right to information, too. Much of it was redacted. I'm sure the member for Hobart would have seen that.

**Ms O'Connor** - Yes.

**Ms FORREST** - That alone should give us pause about what else we need to know particularly under the redactions. What else do we need to know about this?

There was no proactive release of this information. We do not know how many mortalities have occurred in any of the farms where these occur below the mass mortality reporting thresholds. I'd like to know - just out of interest - how many dead fish have been removed in the last 12 months from Macquarie Harbour where it hasn't been used.

**Ms O'Connor** - How do we know?

**Ms FORREST** - We don't. Unless it reaches a mass mortality level, we don't know. But I understand from my local intelligence that there is a lot; it's just not in one go above the reporting level. Because this occurs outside the ready view of Tasmanians - this is the industry itself - it should be proactively reported, deaths and mortalities, as well as antibiotic use.

I know that when I've spoken about the mining sector in this place before, you might think, what's the relevance? There is relevance because we know how dangerous a construction site is. Construction sites are the most dangerous places for workers to work. Mines aren't.

They're one of the safest places, but when a death occurs on a mine site, it's on the front page of the papers for months. That's not because those people are more important than a worker who dies or is seriously harmed on a construction site.

My theory for this - and it's only a theory - is that because it's underground, out of the way, in the dark and no-one else can see it except those people who are there, it's easier to hide it. People can't see it, so they imagine it must be far worse. But in this case, you can't see it and it actually is much worse because we're just not seeing the information that would enable us to make informed decisions and choices.

The consequences around the use of florfenicol are not just theoretical. Public health advice had already been issued to swimmers and recreational fishers around the ongoing use of florfenicol in the south-west waters. I remember the briefing; there was a reluctance to say whether it was safe or not for humans to consume and how much they could consume of a native fish that had been caught in the vicinity, for children or older people, or people with poor liver function or whatever. The reality is, we just don't really know.

The rock lobster fishery, a fishery of enormous economic and cultural significance, was temporarily closed as a direct result. That's a pretty serious outcome and these are not minor inconveniences. For rock lobster fishers, a closure is a loss of income, lost seasons compounding uncertainty about the future of their operations in waters they have fished for generations. That's for the recreational fishers alone, not talking about the commercial rock lobster fishers. Also, for recreational users, it's a loss of confidence in the safety of the waters they rightly regard as the public good.

I think we all appreciate the high value of the rock lobster exports into the Asian market, particularly from here, a market that has zero tolerance for antibiotic residues. This is not an abstract environmental concern. They just say zero, that's it. Any sign of it, that's it. You could lose your market. We can't afford to lose this market. We need to look after the fishery, absolutely. It's a critically important market for this state.

It is a direct and immediate trade risk for a commercially significant Tasmanian industry. We should be informed about what's going on. That sector should be informed about what's going on.

The scale of environmental spread, when eventually tested, proved far wider than the initial assurances suggested. Testing by the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies found florfenicol present in Standaway Bay, 10.6 kilometres from the nearest treated salmon pen. Of 840 samples taken from wild fisheries, including rock lobster, abalone, sea urchins, mussel and periwinkles, 165 tested positive. A further 209 were still awaiting analysis since results were made public.

The antibiotic was detected in multiple species, at distances that no-one predicted, and that the original 3-kilometre public health advisory plainly did not anticipate. We should be very concerned about this.

We did see the federal government intervene on this. The members should be clear about what the intervention confirmed. On 20 February 2026, the APVMA notified the permit holder, it proposed to suspend the permit based on new information about florfenicol detections in non-target species. The permit holder was given until 2 March 2026 to provide evidence that would

address the regulator's concerns. As I understand it, that evidence was not forthcoming to the APVMA's satisfaction, and thus the suspension of the permit took effect on 4 March 2026. This was on the grounds of, and I quote from the APVMA directly, 'unacceptable risk of residue exposure to non-target species'.

Florfenicol can no longer be used under the provisions of that permit at this current time.

To clarify the question I had when this motion came before us: is the Okehampton Bay application by Tassal to use florfenicol in the rich recreational fishing borders of the Mercury Passage currently moot? Is that the case? The permit under which it would have proceeded has been suspended, so one assumes it is. Yet the application itself tells us something important, even as consequences in south-eastern waters are mounting. The industry was moving to expand florfenicol use to an entirely new region.

The Mercury Passage was genuinely at risk. It was only the federal government's intervention, not just action by our own state government, that has stayed this outcome for now. I note, too, that the days before the suspension took effect, as I understand from information I've seen, Tassal commenced florfenicol treatment in five of its leases on a single day. This was described as unprecedented. The rush to administer the antibiotics - how much has been put in we do not know - before the ban took effect is not the conduct of an industry confident in the science supporting its use.

The suspension vindicates the concerns this motion raises. The APVMA's own Senate estimates evidence, given just weeks before the suspension, showed the regulator was already flagging the need for substantially more data on antimicrobial resistance before any permanent approval could be considered. The suspension confirmed those concerns were well founded.

I know the member for Hobart spoke about the implications of antibiotic resistance. I remember 20 years ago, working as a nurse, the genuine concerns that our intensivists in intensive care units and in those areas where you get critically ill patients, where being in hospital is the worst place you can be for picking up infections. There was a real concern about antibiotic resistance, and that continues. We're forever chasing more powerful antibiotics, which keep getting more toxic, with more side effects. This has happened over many years, through the misuse of antibiotics in human health. It's not as common anymore, but patients used to go to the GP expecting to leave with something they need, and if not given a script for antibiotics when they have a cold, they think they're not being treated properly. Thankfully our GPs are much more robust in saying 'It's not something we can treat with antibiotics'. However, there was a period in time when almost anyone who turned up with any sort of upper respiratory issue that may be an infection, antibiotics were dispensed. That has progressed the antimicrobial resistance.

We should focus on the science. The motion correctly notes that there is limited available science to support intensive, widespread use of florfenicol, and limited understanding of its residual properties and impacts on marine ecology. This is not a fringe issue. It's not a Greens issue, with all due respect to our Greens member. It's a matter that affects all of us. It reflects the state of the evidence: the APVMA suspension of the permit on the grounds of unacceptable risks to non-target species; their regulatory finding that confirms exactly this. It's about our whole marine environment, not just the aquaculture industry, but it's the aquaculture industry which is adding to this challenge with the use of antibiotics.

What we do know about antimicrobial resistance is serious and well established, as I mentioned. Antibiotic resistance is one of the most significant global public health threats of our time, and I can't say that strongly enough; because if we lose the capacity to treat patients effectively with effective antibiotics, people will die who wouldn't have otherwise. Children will die from infections because we can't find an antibiotic that actually responds to that bacterium they've got. That's how it used to be, back in the day, when people had big families because they expected to lose children. Our life expectancy was much less because we often died of infections that we now think are just something we can deal with.

The World Health Organization, the Australian Government and the scientific community are in consensus: the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in humans and animals is the primary driver of antimicrobial resistance. The development of resistance to last-resort antibiotics is not a distant risk. Last-resort antibiotics are the really high-powered ones that have very significant side effects. You have to be in an intensive care unit often and have them IV, being fully monitored, because they're not very pleasant. It's now occurring and the consequences for human health will be profound and irreversible.

The long-term use of antibiotics as a routine management tool in industrial fish farms is not consistent with the science on antimicrobial resistance, or the principles of sustainable marine husbandry. A genuinely sustainable salmon industry or aquaculture industry does not rely on mass antibiotic use to compensate for stocking densities or farm conditions that make disease outbreaks likely in the first place.

When you think back to the days of the plague, they didn't know what was spreading the plague to start with. They weren't aware of the need to isolate, separate themselves from people with it, and they'd just throw their dead bodies out in the street, so the person would come along and collect them on the cart: 'Bring out your dead.' We know that crowded conditions with infectious diseases makes them more likely to thrive. It's pretty simple.

The way we're operating here is not sustainability, it's a dependence on growth that grows more dangerous over time. I go back to my point in the beginning: I believe this can be a sustainable industry if only we act in a different way. I want to be clear about the alternatives I'm advocating for, because I support the motion. I do not think the choice is simply between the industry as it is and no industry at all, though some people prefer no industry at all. I accept that, but that's not my view.

A sustainable salmon industry in Tasmania is achievable, in my view. It requires stocking densities that reflect the carrying capacity of the receiving environment, and that will differ from place to place and differ from time to time: time of the year, the trajectory of climate change, all of those things; but it does require serious investment in site selection and breeding programs that produce fish that have greater disease resistance and reduce the need for antibiotic intervention.

The question of vaccination: yes, the little fish, little fries, are vaccinated when they're little before they go out into the big water. I understand it from the briefing we had when this matter first really started to emerge, that vaccination only lasts about six months and the fish are in the water for up to two years in the big water. So, that's work that needs to be done. Vaccination is a far better mechanism, as a preventative mechanism for all manner of disease, than just treating with more and more and more antibiotics of greater and greater strength or broader spectrum.

Sustainable industry requires farm placement decisions that do not compromise shared-use fisheries and recreational waterways, and it requires a regulatory framework with genuine teeth, and one that sets enforceable standards, rather than simply reporting outcomes after the fact. We have seen some good work by the EPA because they monitored beyond the target area and I congratulate them for that, but we need to see much more proactive release of information so that it would help all of us, but also the EPA, one would imagine.

What I'm suggesting here are not radical propositions. They are, in my view, baseline conditions for an industry that can co-exist with Tasmania's other marine industries, its public health obligations and its environmental values over the long term. The current trajectory of growing volumes of antibiotic use, limited science around the impacts, opaque reporting, and impacts on public health and shared fisheries is not that. That's not where we are.

So, this motion is a call for a publicly accessible portal providing real-time information on where, when and in what quantities antibiotics are being used on fish in Tasmanian fish farms. In my view, that's the minimum that Tasmanians who share these waterways are entitled to expect. The fact that 815 kilograms of florfenicol could be deployed in three weeks without the public knowing is not a regulatory oversight; it's a structural failure of transparency.

I note that even when this permit was suspended, the situation did not meaningfully improve. Attempts to obtain updated figures on total florfenicol use through parliamentary questions, departmental briefings and RTI requests throughout the permit period often came up against barriers of commercial-in-confidence and other matters. This is not something that should come down to commercial interests when the health and safety of our environment, our people and our other industries are at risk.

The government's answer, ultimately, was that the EPA does not hold current aggregate usage figures. Why not? The data would only be made available through final monitoring reports published progressively on the EPA website. Well, it's a bit late then, and that's not good enough. Recreational fishers, swimmers, commercial fishers and coastal communities deserve to be able to make informed decisions in real time, to enable them to make their own decisions about their own personal activities in those waterways, not to find out months later through parliamentary hearings or some other mechanism - or not at all, perhaps - because the industry claims commercial confidentiality over the information with direct public health implications. That's not good enough.

I do support this element of the motion. The technology exists for a portal that can have time-of-use reporting and I call on the government to act. The technology to deliver such information exists and the public interest case for this is overwhelming. What is lacking, it seems, is the political will to require it of the industry that frankly has operated too long without adequate accountability.

In concluding and supporting this motion, I do not do it as an attack on the salmon industry, but as a statement of what responsible, evidence-based regulation looks like, as well as a responsible, evidence-based industry looks like, and how far short of the standard we are currently falling. This industry is a significant employer in regional Tasmania and can, and in my view should, operate in a transparent, sustainable and environmentally safe way.

Tasmania's marine environment is a public asset. Its health is a precondition for tourism, recreation, commercial fishing and the long-term viability of aquaculture itself; otherwise they

will shoot themselves in the foot. We cannot afford to manage it on a basis of incomplete information, inadequate science and a transparency framework that does not enable the timely extraction of basic and important facts. So, I call on the government, along with the member for Hobart's call, to respond to the evidence before us with urgency, to require greater transparency, to impose precautionary limits on antibiotic use pending proper scientific review, and to work with the industry towards a genuinely sustainable model that does not depend on mass antibiotic deployment to function. If that's how we operated our health system, we would be going backwards.

In my view, the salmon industry can be done well. Whether it is being done well right now is a question the evidence does not allow us to answer with any confidence. In fact, I think the evidence is to the contrary. The federal regulator has now confirmed that what this motion argues -

**Sitting suspended from 4.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.**

## **MOTION**

### **Florfenicol Use in Tasmania**

**Resumed from above.**

[4.30 p.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Thank you, Mr President. I had almost completed my contribution. I just wanted to finish off what I was saying about some of the challenges as I see it.

The federal regulator has now confirmed what this motion argues. The risk is real science was insufficient and the consequences for the marine environment were not contained. The APVMA's CEO told the Senate committee that the emergency permit was being used to build a case for permanent registration, and the permanent registration will make it harder, not easier, for regulators to act if things go wrong.

The evidence from the federal regulator should be the starting point for a serious conversation about where the industry goes from here.

Our natural assets and natural environment should be transparently managed through an evidence-based approach. Community trust and trust in government and the industry rely on such an approach. A lack of public trust means industry in whatever sector will not have a social licence.

This can be done, and it must be done, and it must be done better. I support the motion and expect the government to act.

[4.32 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Thank you, Mr President. The use of antibiotics in any industry should not be treated lightly.

Florfenicol is a veterinary medicine and its approval for emergency use was and is a matter for the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, the APVMA - I'll use that again rather than that long one - which is the independent national regulator. In Tasmania, the EPA's role is different and equally important.

The EPA's task is to ensure monitoring for antibiotic residues in the environment and to ensure the use of antibiotics in finfish farming does not cause environmental harm.

Public health advice sits with the Department of Health and the Director of Public Health. Those separate functions matter because good regulation depends on clear lines of responsibility and independent decision-making.

The first point in the motion is in relation to the quantity of florfenicol. The EPA has made it clear it does not currently hold a single aggregate figure for actual use.

What it initially receives are proposed maximum quantities for planned treatment and monitoring purposes, not verified actual use. Verified quantities are confirmed later through the final Therapeutant Residue Monitoring Report, and those reports are progressively published on the EPA website. In other words, the motion invites the Council to treat an early number elicited through conversational questioning at Estimates as if it were the definitive regulatory truth, which it is not. A raw kilogram figure stripped of contents tells very little about environmental effect.

What matters is the dosage regime, the veterinary basis for treatment, the manner of administration and the environmental half-life, the uptake by fish, the residue profile in the water, sediments in wild fish, and whether any of that indicates a risk to the environment or to human health. That is how regulators assess these questions.

The second point in the motion appears to suggest that parliamentary scrutiny is the only reason the public is aware of antibiotic treatments. Again, this is not reflective of the actual situation.

Since November 2025, the EPA has provided public notification of antibiotic treatment events, published detailed monitoring schedules, and progressively released final reports once monitoring is complete and checked. Government platforms have carried treatment information, public health advice and maps, and more than 43,000 recreational fishers were directly contacted with relevant information. That is a high degree of public disclosure, coupled with the discipline of publishing verified information rather than speculation.

Indeed, the public-facing fishing advice currently states that effective from 4 March 2026, the APVMA suspended the permit for florfenicol, that recreational fishing is not closed due to florfenicol, and that guidance exists for fishers who would prefer to avoid traces of antibiotics in their catch. That advice also points people to maps showing recently treated marine farms and the recommended 3-kilometre buffer zone. This is transparency in practical form.

The third point of the motion seeks to draw a straight line between the florfenicol use, public health warnings and the temporary closure of part of the rock lobster fishery. That conflation is misleading. The Director of Public Health's advice has consistently been that there

is no evidence of harm to human health from consuming traces of florfenicol. There are no public health restrictions on recreational fishing within 3 kilometres of a treated lease.

The public health advice is precautionary only. It allows people who wish to avoid possible trace exposure to choose not to eat wild fish caught within 3 kilometres of a treated lease during treatment and for 21 days afterwards. That is choice-based precautionary guidance and is not a declaration of demonstrated public health danger. The temporary closure, in part, of the commercial rock lobster fishery was described by government as a precautionary market access measure, not a public health finding. Precaution is not proof of harm and market protection is not the same thing as human health risk.

The fourth point refers to Okehampton Bay and Mercury Passage, plainly, to extend concern from one regulatory context into another -

**Ms O'Connor** - Well, hang on. Two permits were applied for, one was Okehampton Bay.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I didn't interfere or interject, so I'll finish. But again, the APVMA is the decision-maker on permit applications. The Tasmanian government is not the national statutory authority for that purpose.

On the fifth point, the government accepts that the use of florfenicol is a matter of public interest. The EPA has implemented what it describes as one of the most comprehensive antibiotic residue monitoring programs undertaken in Australian aquaculture, with monitoring schedules developed through scientific literature review, consultation with Public Health, baseline sampling before treatment, and a before-after, control-impact design to distinguish treatment effects from background variation.

That leads directly to the sixth point of the motion, which claims there is little available science to support the use of florfenicol, and little understanding of its residual properties and environmental impact. The EPA and the Department of Health have provided briefings outlining that the monitoring and research effort is internationally significant, based on actual in-field monitoring rather than modelled outputs. With 3188 analytical results across four leases at that point in time, EPA officers described it as the biggest study undertaken on this question. The detail bears that out. As at early March, 1302 water analytical results had been reviewed. Only 12.5 per cent of results obtained outside treated leases were above the laboratory reporting limit, and to clarify this reporting limit, it is the level at which the laboratory has confidence in the accuracy and precision of the result. It was a very low level, and no analytical result above the reporting limit occurred beyond seven days after treatment. Concentrations decreased with distance from lease boundaries and with depth in the water column.

Sediment data showed 1274 results, with only 15 above the reporting limit, or 1.2 per cent of all results. Only three detections were outside lease boundaries. In wild fish, less than 2 per cent of samples analysed to date were above the reporting limit. The results above that limit were within 1 kilometre of treated leases.

The final monitoring report for Meads Creek and Stringers Cove reinforces that picture. It records all sediment samples, both baseline and post-treatment, were below reporting limits. Water detection above the reporting limit were confined to mid-treatment and day one post-treatment, with no detections above the reporting limit by day seven post-treatment. Out

of 100 pulled wild fish samples, only two were above reporting limits, both on day one post-treatment, with all later post-treatment samples below the reporting limit.

There is substantial and a growing body of Tasmanian scientific evidence. Peer review is underway, species sensitivity distribution curves are being developed, consistent with national frameworks, and the EPA's environmental risk assessment is being finalised.

The seventh point concerns antimicrobial resistance. This is a serious issue globally. The government material before us acknowledges the complexity of antimicrobial resistance, noting that florfenicol is not used to treat human infections in Australia, and records that public health authorities do not currently regard the observed environmental findings as evidence of immediate harm to human health. At the same time, further research with IMAS and EPA is being undertaken on antimicrobial resistance questions. That is an appropriate approach, Mr President.

The eighth point in the motion asserts long-term use of antibiotics by industrial salmon farms is not supported by science or sustainable for marine ecologies. Again, that is framed as an absolute proposition when the evidence and the regulatory context are much more nuanced. No-one sensibly argues that antibiotics should become a substitute for good husbandry, vaccination, biosecurity or improved farming practice. Equally, no-one can seriously maintain that in livestock systems, whether terrestrial or aquatic, there will never be circumstances in which veterinary treatment is necessary to prevent suffering.

The material before us states that antibiotics are used as a last resort for bacterial disease control and fish welfare. Work continues on vaccines, breeding and other measures. This is not an argument for routine dependence. It is an argument for keeping lawful therapeutic options available, under strict control where clinically justified.

Finally, the ninth point calls for a real-time public portal showing where, when, and in what quantities, antibiotics are used. Much of the location and timing information already exists, through treatment notices, maps, EPA schedules, public advice and direct communications to fishers. The more contentious part is a demand for real-time quantities, but the EPA has already explained why that is not a simple or necessarily responsible proposition. The initial figures proposed are maximum amounts for treatment planning and monitoring purposes, not verified actual use. Actual verified quantities only emerge through final reporting. Publishing unverified figures as if they were final would not improve public confidence.

This motion asks the Chamber to make a series of sweeping findings in circumstances where the independent regulators have done what they are meant to do: monitor, investigate, publish, review, refine and advise. The EPA has exercised independent statutory functions; the Department of Health has provided precautionary public advice without overstating risk; and the APVMA has acted in its own jurisdiction, including suspending the permit from 4 March 2026. That is not a picture of neglect. It is a picture of an adaptive regulatory system responding to the new information as it emerges.

I have a couple of clarification points that I'd like to make, as well. To clarify statements made by honourable members regarding stocking rates or stocking density, I'm advised that the NRE and EPA Reflections and Learnings - 2025 Mortality Event Report, which was released in October 2025, states:

To increase the understanding of the relationship between stocking densities and the management of the *P. salmonis* disease outbreaks, NRE Tas examined the available practice research.

The review of literature indicates while stocking density has long been considered a risk factor for infectious disease outbreaks in aquaculture, no single density threshold reliably prevents *P. salmonis*.

Furthermore, I'm advised that it has been standard practice in Tasmania to farm well below the prescribed stocking density limits. Reporting from one company during the 2025 mortality event indicates that pens in the vicinity of the primary event location were carrying stocking densities below 9.3 kilograms per cubic metre. That's one piece of clarification.

In regard to the statements concerning government inaction on development of vaccines, I would like to provide this to honourable members. Everyone, including government, industry, and the community, wants to ensure last summer's devastating salmon mortality event is not repeated. That is why the Tasmanian salmonid industry, with support from government and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, has invested heavily in research to develop a vaccine against this disease.

The Centre for Aquatic Animal Health and Vaccines (CAAHV) is undertaking research and development of vaccines with a view to mitigating the risk associated with this bacterium. This program of work includes research on both current and new *P. salmonis* vaccines. I'm also advised that scientists are assessing the longevity of protection against *P. salmonis* in fish vaccinated with Tegovac Plus-EC. This is the vaccine that has been broadly deployed across salmon farms in Tasmania.

This longevity trial, in addition to on-farm observations, is key to understanding how the vaccine performs over a production-relevant time scale. The trial will also incorporate a pilot study to assess an oral booster vaccine for *P. salmonis*. In parallel, scientists have also commenced an initial study in the development of a second-generation *P. salmonis* vaccine. These activities are critical and ongoing.

For those reasons, the government cannot support a motion that understates the work of the regulators and risks undermining public confidence in institutions that are acting with independence and scientific discipline.

[4.50 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President. I am pleased to rise to make a brief contribution to this debate. I thank the honourable member for Hobart for raising what I believe is an important matter and, as the member for Murchison pointed out, not a Greens matter but a whole-of-community matter that's of considerable interest to many Tasmanians.

The member for Hobart has provided a comprehensive, strong and detailed analysis of concern surrounding the recent use of the antibiotic florfenicol by the salmon industry in Tasmania. I also appreciated the detail that the member for Murchison went to in her contribution here today as well, covering many of these matters quite comprehensively. I don't intend to do that in my contribution, but there are some things that I wanted to touch on that I think it's worth noting in relation to this matter.

Clearly, there's an engaged and ongoing public interest in the ramifications of usage of antibiotics such as florfenicol in industrial fish farms and in our marine and fresh waterways. It affects not only our natural environment but it also potentially affects people. Importantly, it also affects the levels of trust the community has in public authorities. I find it quite astonishing to suggest that calls for greater transparency are somehow a way of undermining public trust, when in fact they are quite the opposite. They are seeking to build and solidify public trust in our public authorities. It's the lack of transparency that's the problem here, and that's one of the things this motion points to as needing to be addressed.

Trust is eroded not just by concerns over the degree to which this antibiotic may or may not be detected in our waters, but also the lack of transparency around government information-sharing and decision-making. For example, I'm sure we all here recall the degree of public frustration voiced at the end of last year when people were trying to ascertain where swimmers and recreational fishers should or should not safely access certain coasts and waters, following mass salmon mortality incidents and also following the use of antibiotics.

We saw the temporary closure of unrelated fisheries such as the rock lobster industry, as the motion before us notes in part (3), which is incredibly concerning that we're having to basically pit industries off against each other, in a way. We're having to take actions, apparently to serve the interests of one industry, which is distinctly at odds with the interests of another important industry for this state. I know the member for Hobart and member for Murchison spoke about that in some detail, and I endorse the comments that they made.

Further, it's a concerning matter of fact, well established and on the public record now, that as detailed in clause (2) of the motion before us, a large amount, 815 kilograms, of florfenicol was used over three weeks in fish farms last year, only to come to light due to parliamentary questioning and examinations. Public disquiet over the impact of industrial-scale use of antibiotics in the fish farms, as well as the broader impact of those fish farms, is growing. Public disquiet is growing. We need to take action to help address that.

This is evident in the CSIRO report released last week which presented data collated in April 2025 examining 900 Tasmanian residents' connection to and concern for the local marine environment. The report, undertaken by behavioural scientist Dr Corrine Condie and marine scientist Dr Scott Condie, found that 'salmon aquaculture stands out as the only local industry posing both a significant threat and a major concern' among respondents. Further, the study found that the salmon industry experienced 'a significant and sustained shift from the strong community support experienced from 1986 to 2015 when the industry held an "enviable" social licence to operate'. According to the report, more than 90 per cent of respondents said Tasmania's waterways were central to their way of life and 70 per cent were 'worried or angry' about its health.

There are two significant matters distinct from its content when considering this CSIRO report. One is that the survey occurred in April last year, prior to the most recent and egregious salmon mortality incidents. Yet even then, 90 per cent of the respondents were worried or angry about the health of our waterways. The other is the composition of those 900 residents who were surveyed. These were not necessarily those who have been campaigning for years against the impact of salmon farms, although I contend their input would be as valuable as anybody else's. But instead, those surveyed by the CSIRO researchers consisted of aquaculture workers, marine scientists, government employees, commercial fishers, marine tourism operators,

environmental and Aboriginal advocacy groups, and recreational water users - a pretty broad section of our community.

Hence, it's a straightforward proposition to concur with paragraph (5) of the motion that the use of florfenicol and other increasingly strong antibiotics is a matter of significant public interest and concern. Saying that is absolutely uncontroversial. There's literally no reason the government couldn't, for example, agree with that part of this motion. It's absolutely uncontroversial to say it's a matter of public interest and concern, of course it is. The point does not go on to say 'and therefore it should all be stopped'. It doesn't say that. It just notes the public interest and concern.

A significant and growing area of community concern is the potential long-term impacts of intensive and widespread use of antibiotics such as florfenicol in our marine environment, especially the potential for antibiotic resistance and any resulting antimicrobial resistance across the impacted ecosystems. These concerns are very real and are not going to go away with a few reassuring pats on the head. This is one of the main areas of concern which are regularly raised with me when it comes to finfish farming.

Recently, I've had my attention drawn to a research article published in the March edition of the *Journal of Fish Diseases*. The article in question is called 'Sub-inhibitory concentrations of florfenicol modulate the expression of biofilm formation and antibiotic resistance-associated genes in biofilm-embedded *Piscirickettsia salmonis*'. That's a big, long title there. This research has considerable bearing for the Tasmanian situation in light of the departmental statements that the response to the recent outbreaks of *P. salmonis* was not to try to eradicate the disease, but to instead provide sufficient antibiotics to help the immune system of the affected fish cope with the disease. In other words, to provide a sub-inhibitory or sub-ethal dose.

This very recent and published research appears to be raising the prospect that sub-inhibitory doses of florfenicol have been found to enhance biofilms and antibiotic resistance. I am not a marine scientist, right here, I'm stating that very plainly. However, I've had this research distilled for me by someone who is, and basically it has found the bacterium forms biofilms on surfaces where it can persist for a long time, basically hiding on those surfaces and mutating.

Further, sublethal doses of antibiotics kill off the weak bacterial cells and leave the resistant bacterial cells as the breeders for the next generation. It's been explained to me that this then can result in these biofilm colonies of antibiotic-resistant bacteria forming, ready to seed another infestation as soon as more fish are added. In such a sub-inhibitory or sublethal dose scenario, the disease, in fact, never eradicates, it just keeps getting worse, according to this particular research. It's a deeply concerning prospect, which would be consistent with the points that are made in this motion's paragraphs (6), (7) and (8).

I'm not peer-reviewing that research; I don't have the expertise to do so, but what it points to is that this is a matter of discussion, it's a matter of research, it's a matter of debate, and it's one that is entirely uncontroversial to say it's of public interest and continues to need to be discussed.

I would also say - just to pick up on that contribution from the government - point (8) of this motion, which says 'Agrees the long-term use of antibiotics by industrial salmon farms is not supported by science or sustainable for marine ecologies', is again entirely unremarkable.

**Ms O'Connor** - Statement of fact.

**Ms WEBB** - The government has deliberately misconstrued that in responding to it in its contribution and is pretending that point (8) says we should never use antibiotics in the marine environment, which is of course not at all what point (8) says. There is nothing controversial or contestable about saying the long-term use of antibiotics that is going on and on and on in the marine environment by industrial salmon farms is not supported by science or sustainable for marine ecologies. No-one would say that it is. It's only when you misconstrue the point with a strawman argument that you get to oppose it.

Which brings me to the last paragraph calling for the establishment of a publicly accessible portal, detailing in real-time where, when and in what quantities antibiotics are being used in Tasmanian fish farms so the public, recreational and other commercial fishers can make safe, informed decisions. This comes back to public interest and trust. This, of course, is a responsible and sensible course of action to suggest. It is in the public interest, and it is about building trust. It's about empowering communities to feel that they can make informed decisions. Real-time reporting is an investment in public trust and confidence, as well as fostering a sense of real-time responsibility when assessing the need to take any form of remedial action. I realise that the definition of real-time is something we've visited in this Chamber on a range of issues and can be interpreted differently. In this context, I would consider it appropriate, feasible and manageable for the antibiotic-use data to be published via the proposed portal at the same time it's received by the relevant authorities such as the EPA.

The government seems to suggest that sometimes the thing reported initially is not what ends up actually being put into the water. Well, that can certainly be demonstrated and provided as information on the portal. You could literally have the portal say, 'Initial notification, *X* amount', and then have final amount used, '*X* amount'. It's not very complicated to provide information to people if you're prepared to be honest and transparent about it. You can explain the data that you're presenting and people will understand how best to interpret it. Transparency is defensible; secrecy isn't defensible.

I do not think that in this Chamber we necessarily have a responsibility to work through the practical logistics of exactly how the proposed portal would work or not work. Instead, the purpose of the debate is to make it clear that this Chamber, if it supports this motion, indicates it wants a portal to exist, and wants this real-time data provision to be an output of this new piece of public information infrastructure.

I note that although the member for Hobart tabled this motion in December last year, the need for such a piece of timely public information infrastructure, as the proposed portal, was highlighted again with recent revelations reported in February this year of a different antibiotic in use in the Huon Aquaculture Meadowbank hatchery.

This use of the antibiotic oxytetracycline (OTC) in the Meadowbank hatchery in January this year only came to light due to a journalist's inquiries. Despite the company in question voluntarily disclosing its antibiotic use to the EPA - good on Huon Aquaculture for making that voluntary disclosure to the EPA - it wasn't required as a matter of its licence; it did so off its own bat. It was the EPA who then kept it entirely secret. The public was not informed, and who knows if the public would ever have been informed if it hadn't come to light through those other means.

I said at that time that the revelations that came to light of the failure to inform the public of the serious community concerns over secrecy surrounding the use of florfenicol last year, is a shocking failure to learn lessons in this industry, necessary to build public trust and maintain confidence. Again, the failure in that case was on the part of the regulator, the EPA, and the government in terms of policy and what would be required of industry. It wasn't a failure of the industry, which voluntarily disclosed it.

Tasmanians have a right to expect rigorous regulation and timely reporting of all antibiotic use and environmental conditions of fish farm hatcheries located near freshwater rivers, particularly those which feed into our public water supplies, as well as in our marine based fish farms. The basic fact of the matter is we will not rebuild public trust and confidence, we will not turn around that extent of upset and anger over the deteriorating health of our waterways, without moving to a mandatory reporting of antibiotic use and across both marine and freshwater fisheries, along with real-time disclosure of monitoring processes. Whether it's called a portal or a dashboard or whatever is the current government-speak for such a facility outlined by this motion, this needs to be put in place as soon as possible. It also needs to be funded, resourced and maintained in order to fully deliver on the intent of this motion and the community calls for such a reliable public information tool.

One last comment before I end my contribution. I believe the establishment of the proposed portal can be acted upon immediately as it does not cut across, or impede in any way, the current independent study into Tasmania's salmon industry. Nor is it reliant on the outcomes of that inquiry to be progressed. There is no good or logical reason for the proposed portal, as outlined in the motion before us, to not be supported or implemented.

I support this motion.

[5.05 p.m.]

**Ms ARMITAGE** (Launceston) - Thank you, Mr President. I wasn't going to speak on this motion, but there's been so much discussion, and I've been a little confused both ways as to whether I'd support it or not. I've never actually learnt so much in such a short time, from both listening and reading, plus AI.

**Mr Vincent** - I haven't heard the word 'florfenicol' so many times.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - I'm not going to say the first word. I'm going to say *P. salmonis*, as opposed to trying to get around that word.

I will start by saying I actually have no problem either with farmed salmon and I do support the salmon industry. I understand the issues to do with florfenicol being a broad-spectrum antibiotic used extensively in veterinary medicine, particularly in aquaculture, swine and poultry.

One of the issues I often say when you're using a lot of antibiotics is the fact we hear from doctors, and having worked in the medical industry for a while, I have a lot of friends who are doctors, who used to say one of the real issues is the more you use antibiotics, obviously the bigger problem you actually have when it comes to bacteria. The more that's out there, the harder it is to treat different bacteria and the more resistant they become. That is an issue that I certainly agree with. As it was saying, the key worldwide problems with florfenicol

and resistance, increased florfenicol use has led to the proliferation of bacteria that can resist this antibiotic. That's an issue we have with lots of antibiotics.

It has been mentioned earlier when people go to doctors, the more they give it out, the harder it is to actually get better, often, when you take antibiotics. I suppose the same can be said for painkillers. Many people take far too many painkillers and when they take them, they no longer work. Our bodies become resistant.

Looking at item (9), there are a couple of issues that I have a bit of a problem with, and I sort of struggle with No. 6 - 'Understands there is little available science to support such intensive, widespread use of florfenicol and limited to no understanding of its residual properties and impact on marine ecology'.

I'm not entirely sure I can support that because my understanding is that science is changing all the time and obviously it's being looked at. Point (7) says, 'Accept the evidence'. Well, do I accept the evidence? These are the problems that I have that if I support it, then I have to say that I accept the evidence. Do I? I'm not really sure when I look at it and I've been Googling and looking at AI, and at a variety of different issues to do with florfenicol. It's difficult to say that word, let alone the *P. salmonis*.

I guess one of the things I note with this is that, obviously effective from 4 March, the APVMA suspended the permit for the use of florfenicol and that it can't be used under the provisions of the permit, currently.

I also noted the regulator notice on the antibiotic treatment administration of florfenicol, where it says in the event that fish and marine farms should require florfenicol treatment, companies must advise the Environment Protection Authority, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania and Biosecurity Tasmania before the treatment is applied. The EPA is responsible for ensuring monitoring of antibiotic residues in the environment is undertaken and to ensure that the use of antibiotics in finfish farming does not cause environmental harm.

NRE Tasmania is responsible for administering the biosecurity program, Tasmanian Salmonoid Industry. It's also responsible for administering the Tasmanian *Primary Produce Safety Act 2011* and the Primary Produce Safety (Seafood) Regulations 2023, which apply food safety standards and controls to the primary production and processing of seafood.

I was pleased to hear the explanation by the Leader, and I thought it did clear some points up. It certainly made me feel a little more comfortable with what was being undertaken by the EPA and NRE with regards to florfenicol and the compliance audit schedule.

I certainly appreciate the member for Hobart bringing this forward though, because, as I said, I've learnt more in these last couple of hours than I actually knew about florfenicol and certainly there's some information out there.

Some of these items I do support. Some of the numbers - (1), (2), (3) - certainly there are ones there that I support. I note the application has been made by Tassal to use florfenicol at Okehampton Bay, in what's considered the rich recreational and fishing waters of the Mercury Passage.

I also noted in November 2025, obviously, there was residue found in shellfish. There's a lot of information and certainly a lot of discussion, and it's really great we've had the discussion here today.

As I said, I was struggling as to whether I would support or wouldn't support this, but having listened to all the contributions and the contribution from the Leader, plus reading the wealth of information that I have found on the internet with regard to it - including AI, which was quite informative, but I know that you can't always believe AI.

**Ms O'Connor** - You can't. They make stuff up.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - They certainly do, but in this case, they actually support you, member for Hobart, so probably you might not say they made it up this time.

**Ms O'Connor** - Well, they don't always make stuff up.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - I would be very careful with using it. It does go along with some of the other information that's been provided. As I said, I only have a short contribution. I appreciate that this has been brought up by the member for Hobart, because it puts more of a clear eye on it. I'm sure people would now have much more of a look at the situation and transparency. I do have concerns about the use of too much antibiotic in the community, per se, without just florfenicol. On this occasion, I'm not going to say whether I support it or not. I will listen to the member for Hobart's closing and I note the motion.

[5.12 p.m.]

**Mr HARRISS** (Huon) - Thank you, Mr President. I rise to speak on the member for Hobart's motion relating to florfenicol use in Tasmania. Tasmania's salmon industry is one of our largest primary industries, supporting around 5000 jobs, and the vast majority of those - around 90 per cent - are in regional communities. It's therefore important that any discussion regarding its operations is grounded in fact and reflects a strong regulatory framework that already applies.

Florfenicol is not new or an experimental product. It has been used internationally for more than 30 years and is approved in countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Norway. It is also approved in Australia for use in beef and pork industries. Its use in aquaculture was authorised under an emergency permit issued by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, following a thorough assessment.

The industry has pointed out that florfenicol use in aquaculture is strictly controlled:

- veterinary prescription required - only veterinarians can prescribe florfenicol after diagnosing bacterial infection
- government approval - compliance with APVMA permit conditions
- mandatory withholding periods
- regular monitoring - residue testing ensures compliance with safety standards.
- public reporting to both the EPA and Biosecurity Tasmania

- compliance verification - similar compliance programs already exist for other veterinary medicines used in aquaculture.

The Tasmanian Environment Protection Authority has developed a robust monitoring program specifically for florfenicol use. Monitoring components are:

- sediment testing: 50 per cent of treated pens tested at time intervals specified by the EPA, both florfenicol and all metabolites are tested
- wild fish testing: fish sampled from inside leased areas at 500 metres and 1000 metres from farms and at reference sites; testing occurs during treatment and at multiple points afterwards, including at withholding period endpoints
- visual monitoring: underwater surveys during and after treatment to assess any changes to sea floor condition.
- water column testing: regular testing of water at various distances from farms - 35 metres, 100 metres, 500 metres - to track dispersion and dilution.

What does all this mean? When the industry decided the new antibiotic might be helpful, it couldn't simply buy it off the shelf and start using it. First, it needed approval from the interlocking EPA, Biosecurity Tasmania and the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

After considering the merits of the application, the APVMA in November 2025 granted an emergency permit for use of the antibiotic florfenicol in the South Eastern Marine Salmonid Biosecurity Zone of Tasmania under strict conditions. On 20 February this year the authority advised that, at its request, the Tasmanian Department of Natural Resources and the Environment provide new information reporting that very low-level detections of florfenicol amine in some non-target wild fisheries species had been found at various distances from the salmon leases.

After reviewing the data, the APVMA said it had advised the permit holder that it proposed to suspend the permit. The industry was notified that it had 10 days until 2 March to provide evidence that it was not breaching the conditions of the emergency permit. On 5 March, the authority advised that the industry had not provided new data or any evidence of measures which would address its concerns, and therefore the emergency permit had been suspended on the previous day, 4 March. It said the decision had been taken on the basis of unacceptable risk of residue exposure to non-target species.

As we know, there are genuine concerns in other parts of the fishing industry and in the community about antibiotic exposure in wild fisheries. Those concerns need to be respected, and they were. The Director of Public Health has also said there is no evidence of harm to human health from consuming traces of florfenicol. It's appropriate, as I said, that the concerns raised by other sectors of the fishing industry and the broader community are acknowledged. It's also important to recognise that the regulatory system responded promptly and as intended when the new information came to light. Tasmania's salmon industry understands the importance of operating to high environmental standards and continues to work within a strong and independently overseen regulatory framework. Ongoing improvement based on evidence and monitoring should remain the goal; therefore, I don't support the motion.

[5.17 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Hobart) - Thank you, Mr President. Did Mr Whittington write your speech, Mr Harriss?

**Mr Harriss** - No. I -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I mean seriously, with the greatest of respect.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Order. We can't question other members across the Chamber.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay. Well, with the greatest of respect, Mr President, what we heard from the member for Huon - and I have no doubt he's passionate about the jobs in his community - could have been written by John Whittington from Salmon Tasmania. It takes at face value everything that's been said by the industry and indeed by government on this issue, and moving on from that specific speech, it is not sensible to take this industry and the government at face value on this issue because there's a long and sorry history of state capture and regulatory failure around salmon farming in Tasmania.

You only have to look at what's happening in Macquarie Harbour, where a decision has been made by both the federal and the state governments that the fate of the Maugean skate is expendable, a critically endangered species. Then there was all of that sorry history in relation to Macquarie Harbour when there was no data being made available about oxygenation, solids in the water; there's a massive cover-up of the impact on the World Heritage Area, which abuts those salmon leases. Time and time again in this state, highly regrettably, the salmon industry calls the shots. The salmon industry buys \$4000 dinner tickets to go and schmooze with the Premier of Tasmania so that they get exactly the regulations that they want, and they are weak regulations at that.

I found the government's response to this motion to be weak and highly defensive. As a number of honourable members in their contributions have pointed out, there's not a lot to argue with in terms of the facts that are stated in the notice of motion. There isn't, for example, any science on the impacts of the long-term use of antibiotics, including florfenicol, on marine life and human health; we just haven't had the time to do it. If you want to have a look at what's happening over in Chile, where they have very high florfenicol use, there is clear evidence of aquatic dead zones around those pens - and it makes sense, doesn't it, because, as the honourable member for Murchison pointed out, the nature of antibiotics, particularly broad-spectrum ones, is that they're effectively hostile to life. That's what they were designed to do: to kill bacteria, to kill life, and yet, as we know, some of those bacteria survive and then they go on to be resistant to that particular antibiotic, and they can pass on that resistance in their genes.

Now, an extraordinary contribution from the government: information that was extracted from government about the amount of florfenicol that had been used between November of last year and January of this year, we are now told is not reliable. The most recent number that we had is of 815 kilograms of florfenicol being dumped into south-eastern waters in that period. Now we're told it's not verified actual usage; it's simply an early indicator. That begs the question: is it more than 815 kilograms? Is it less than 815 kilograms? How much of the 11,000 kilograms that the APVMA permitted to be used through this permit has gone into Tasmania's marine environment?

The problem that we have here is that the government, on behalf of the industry, is expecting us to take them on trust when they won't tell us the number. Apparently, according to the government, the Environment Protection Authority doesn't know how much florfenicol has been used until they receive their final reports. I don't know if I've misinterpreted the honourable Leader's response, but we've had, to my understanding, one final report published out of 21 so far. Where is this data that the Leader for government kept referring to? It's nowhere on the public record that I can readily identify.

We were told about the biggest study ever undertaken on the question of florfenicol. We haven't seen it, don't know where it is and none of us knows what it says, so we're in a situation where florfenicol's use was suspended weeks ago but the EPA still, as of now, doesn't apparently know how much was used: extraordinary. Who does know? Where is that information? Why isn't it readily accessible? The government is saying, in the Leader's response, that the EPA doesn't currently know how much florfenicol was used for treatments that stopped a month ago, 5 March. Extraordinary. We are being told to take this on trust, given a little pat on the head and told all will be revealed in the fullness of time. Well, it never has been to date, so why should we expect it to be in the future?

I will get back to the basics of this notice of motion. We can all have a different view on industrial finfish farming. Members in this place will know what the Greens' view is, but this motion wasn't about the industry itself. It isn't asking us to form a position on the nature of the industry. It's pointing out some unarguable facts, and I was very careful about the wording in the motion so that each point was unarguable.

It's the final line, which is simply a call for transparency. It's about having respect for the people of Tasmania by providing them with information that is relevant to their lives, whether they're recreational fishers or they swim on the southern beaches, or they're worried about the impact of antimicrobial resistance on human health.

This is information that should be accessible to the people of Tasmania, and I call on the government: if you've got some verified information about the amount of florfenicol that was used while the permit was in operation, bring it to the Council. If you are going to dump on this notice of motion and say it's not verified information, even though it's information we got from the government, well then bring back the facts.

We are being asked to just believe everything is fine. 'We don't have to be more transparent,' says the government on behalf of the industry it always backs in no matter what, even when it means shutting down the rock lobster fishery. This industry gets what it wants out of this government and indeed the quisling Labor Party every single time. All this motion wanted was to give the people of Tasmania some of the tools through information that allow them to make informed choices.

We are talking here about the widespread and intensive use, for a period of time in Tasmania, of an antibiotic which has not been used in Tasmanian waters before. Which has been found in other species, where they were tested, 10 kilometres from where the florfenicol was applied to feed. I don't know if testing happened 15 or 20 kilometres away. You can't find that information. I'd say it wasn't.

I thank all honourable members who made a contribution on this notice of motion. I mildly apologise to the honourable member for Huon for having a crack at him about running

such an industry-boosting contribution. I really appreciated the information that was laid on the record by the honourable member for Murchison, particularly as I don't have a medical brain particularly, so I did learn a lot. I acknowledge and appreciate the honourable member for Nelson's longstanding interest in this area and commitment to seeing more transparency, more robust regulations and less state capture by this industry of this government. I really appreciated the fact that the honourable member for Launceston was interested enough in the conversation to go and find out more. We should all be doing that on this matter which affects our people, the people who we represent.

Part of what I sought to do today through this notice of motion was also to bring this subject forward to the Council because it's very serious. As the honourable member for Murchison made plain, what we're talking about here in future, potentially, is not a minor use or an emergency use permit, it's the registration of florfenicol through the APVMA for use in Tasmania.

**Ms Forrest** - As a registered product.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - As a registered product for widespread intensive use, no doubt, when it suits them, in Tasmanian waters. The APVMA was really clear on this issue. The risk, at this stage, according to the experts who are the federal regulators, of allowing that permit to continue was unacceptable.

I refer honourable members to, and I'm happy to give you a copy of the right-to-information documents that we have, but I also refer honourable members to the correspondence between NRE Tasmania, Biosecurity Tasmania and the EPA, to the federal regulator - which raised a number of concerns about the lack of substance in Salmon Tasmania's push to get this permit through their consultant that they'd engaged.

I hope honourable members will support this because it doesn't cast aspersions on the industry, although my contribution has. It just states the facts. It asks that there be more readily available, real-time information provided to the people who we represent and whose health and wellbeing we have a sacred duty, in this place, to advocate for and uphold however we can.

**Mr PRESIDENT** (Mr Farrell) - The question is that the motion be agreed to.

**The Council divided -**

**AYES 4**

Ms Forrest (Teller)  
Mr Gaffney  
Ms O'Connor  
Ms Webb

**NOES 9**

Ms Armitage  
Mr Edmunds  
Mr Harriss (Teller)  
Mr Hiscutt  
Ms Lovell  
Ms Palmer  
Ms Rattray  
Ms Thomas  
Mr Vincent

**Motion negatived.**

## MOTION

### **Deloitte Access Economics Report: Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform Use in Tasmania - Consideration and Noting**

[5.35 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Mr President, I move -

- (1) The Legislative Council notes:
  - (a) That the Deloitte Access Economics 'Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform use in Tasmania' Report (published on Department of State Growth website 23 January 2026), found the previously planned mandatory poker machine player card with loss limits would:
    - (i) generate greater economic activity and increase jobs in Tasmania, with its central scenario indicating a net increase of Gross State Product of around \$230 million and a net increase of over 200 jobs;
    - (ii) positively impact all industries, with the exception of the EGM sector, and all regions would have a positive or neutral economic impact;
    - (iii) significantly reduce the poker machine gambling expenditure and harm, especially for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm;
    - (iv) and reduce the costs to government delivered and associated services, including in healthcare, mental health support, homelessness programs, policing, courts and corrections.
  - (b) The Tasmanian Government's 'harm minimisation' measures for poker machine regulation announced on 23 January 2026, including:
    - (i) Gaming room closure period extended from 4 hours to 7 hours per day;
    - (ii) Introduction of a Ticket In-Ticket Out (TITO) system;
    - (iii) Setting of a new cap on statewide poker machine numbers;
    - (iv) Introduction of immediate self-exclusion available in venues, and facial recognition technology as part of the exclusion scheme;

- (v) Allowing ATMs to be placed in gaming venues; and
  - (vi) Three Gaming Officers employed statewide by Hospitality Tasmania;
  - (c) Tasmanians' annual poker machine losses for 2024-25 totalled \$193,908,165, a decade-high level of losses; and
- (2) The Legislative Council calls on the Tasmanian Government to confirm in relation to the announced measures of 23 January 2026, whether:
- (a) modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the Government announced measures; and
  - (b) whether, prior to the decision to adopt the measures, the Government obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on the effectiveness of the announced measures to prevent or reduce harm from poker machines.

I rise today to speak on my Motion No.15 on the Notice Paper on the topic of poker machine harm and the Tasmanian government policy on preventing and reducing that harm. It's possible some in the Chamber may be feeling a sense of trepidation given that we all know this is a topic I am passionate about. It's one I have considerable background in and as a result, it's one I can speak about and previously have spoken about at length in this place.

But don't be afraid, Mr President, or other members. Today we're not debating a travesty of a bill hundreds of pages long. We are debating a straightforward motion which notes some matters and which seeks the support of the Chamber for a modest call on the government to confirm two factual matters.

This is an important opportunity to put on the public and parliamentary record accurate facts in the face of government spin. It's an opportunity to begin to clarify the extent to which government policy on this matter has set aside an evidence-based approach very much in the public interest from every angle, in order to pursue blatantly industry-dictated spurious measures which are likely to result in overall more, not less, harm.

But before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that thousands of Tasmanians are experiencing an addiction to poker machines. Tens of thousands of Tasmanians, if not more, are affected by the poker machine addiction of someone close to them, because evidence tells us that for every person experiencing a poker machine addiction, there are on average five to 10 people around them also being harmed. These are family members, friends, workmates and neighbours.

In the event of today's debate triggering some difficulty for anyone in relation to a pokies addiction, or of it promoting, perhaps prompting someone to seek help for harm being caused by pokies, I provide the following sources of help and support on the record. Anglicare Tasmania's free Gamblers Help Service supporting Tasmanians experiencing gambling harm can be contacted on 1800 243 232. There is also a Gambler's Helpline, a 24/7 information,

counselling and referral service which can be contacted on 1800 858 858. And another avenue of assistance is Gambling Helpline, which can be found at [www.gamblinghelponline.org.au](http://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au).

Because we haven't talked about this topic for a while in this place, and for those in the Chamber who haven't been here for previous debates and discussions on the topic, first I'd like to set the scene. Poker machines are designed to be addictive. Around one in six people who regularly sit in front of them to use them as intended recreationally will become addicted to them and 40 to 60 per cent - around half - of the losses to poker machines come from people who struggle to control their use of poker machines. They are people who are addicted or developing an addiction and experiencing active harm.

Poker machine addiction can happen to anyone. It isn't a matter of a lack of responsible decision-making or a lack of willpower or a flawed character. Poker machine addiction is physical. When the button is pressed and during the time of anticipation while the wheels are spinning, dopamine is released in the brain. People become chemically addicted to the dopamine released in their brain during the moment of anticipation while using the machine. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the DSM-5, has classified gambling disorder as a substance-related disorder.

Continuous play on a Tasmanian poker machine allows for the press of a button every three seconds. This sets up a situation where people monotonously press the button, get the hit of dopamine and hit the button again. They enter the 'zone', as it's known. People are not addicted to winning at pokies. In fact, people addicted to pokies are known to describe the annoyance of winning because it interrupts the flow of the zone they are in as they press the button.

Evidence indicates people who are under stress are more likely to become addicted to poker machines because the state of being in the zone dosed with dopamine hits provides relief from stresses. This means people will be more likely to become addicted to poker machines if they are already under financial stress, if they are in a state of grief and if they are affected by trauma in some way.

Evidence also tells us that proximity to poker machine venues also increases the likelihood of developing an addiction. In Tasmania, we disproportionately locate poker machines in our poorest suburbs where people are more likely to be experiencing higher levels of financial stress. The south of Tasmania has 23 poker machines per 10,000 people, the north of Tasmania has 35 poker machines per 10,000 people and the north-west of Tasmania has 64 poker machines per 10,000 people: nearly three times as much as the southern region.

**Ms Forrest** - That's where the poor people live; we know.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes. In the context of southern Tasmania, we have the greatest concentration of poker machines in Glenorchy, known as the golden mile, with the highest LGA losses in the state by that local government area, close to \$2 million per month. We know exactly how to make poker machines less addictive and less harmful to use, but state governments, both Tasmanian Labor and Liberal governments, have consistently chosen not to do that.

To move on to the background relevant to this motion before us, I will provide a quick overview of the key events of recent years that have led us to where we are today. This

parliament passed legislation in 2021 which made a fundamental change to pokies licensing in Tasmania. We moved from a single statewide licence model to an individual venue licence model, and this came into effect in July 2023. This handed every pokies venue a much larger slice of the pokies revenue pie. It was a gift to the venue licence holders of a massive increase in profit from poker machines.

We know from questions to the government in this Chamber that in the first year under the new licensing model, pokies profits retained by the venue were up 55.91 per cent on average statewide, with the average increase in retained profits for the top one-third earners of the licensed pokies venues being 61.99 per cent. It's a massive increase in retained profits from poker machines that was delivered under that licensing change; and we can all observe, most likely in our communities, the results of this, primarily in the near-universal renovations and venue improvements that took place in pokies venues from 2023 onwards.

Warnings that had been made at the time the legislation was passed were borne out. We warned an individual-venue licensing model would lead to higher losses, which we understand from the evidence base to also indicate an increase in pokies addiction and harm. Pokies losses have been elevated ever since the change to the licensing model, and appear to be continuing on an upward trajectory. I compare that to the decade pre-COVID and pre-licensing change where losses were gradually trending down.

After passage of the Gaming Control Amendment (Future Gaming Market) Bill, and as specified in that bill, then treasurer, Michael Ferguson, gave a direction to the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission to undertake research on the harm-minimisation options of a player card system and a facial-recognition technology system. The independent Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission produced a report on that research in 2022, and the clear recommendation in that report was that Tasmania adopt a pokies player card, with programmed loss limits, as the most effective way to reduce pokies harm.

The Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission advised that facial-recognition technology was not effective in preventing or reducing pokies harm, other than for those people already in the registered exclusion schemes at the extremity of their addiction experience. Michael Ferguson MP, as treasurer then, gave a directive to the Liquor and Gaming Commission to develop and implement a nation-leading pokies player card with loss limits as Liberal government policy. That was the first time ever in Tasmania that a policy on regulation of poker machines was not directly dictated by the pokies industry.

It was a momentous step forward for pokies harm reduction in this state that a government of the day, under Michael Ferguson as treasurer, set their policy based on evidence from our gaming commission: for the first time ever, not at the direction of the pokies industry itself. As a result, and as we can all imagine, the pokies industry was strongly opposed to the card and brought influence to bear on the government, no doubt from day one.

In October 2024, MaxGaming provided the government with their delivery plan report on the Tasmanian player card and gaming platform. This 173-page report showed the mandatory card was able to be implemented, providing technical details for each element and design. That was the end result of a consultation process and development process over a period of about a year and a half from the Liquor and Gaming Commission and various stakeholders, including MaxGaming.

Also in October 2024, perhaps in response to industry panic about the advanced stage of development of the card and resultant pressure that the industry brought to bear on government, a Deloitte Access Economics report was commissioned by the Department of State Growth to assess the economic and social impact of the planned card. In November 2024, the government cited the MaxGaming report as a reason to indefinitely delay rolling out the player card, claiming complexity, costs, and implementation delays. However, the chair of the gaming commission made it clear, in an interview on the ABC Radio *Mornings* program on 20 November 2024, that she was disappointed and saddened that the government was indefinitely delaying the card. She stated it was almost within our grasp to have a groundbreaking reform.

She said the Liquor and Gaming Commission fully believed in this, and had worked through all the issues and challenges that had been raised in consultation with MaxGaming, with Tabcorp executives, with the liquor and gaming branch of Treasury, and with the commission itself. The chair of the gaming commission confirmed in that ABC Radio interview that the liquor and gaming commission had put all the resolved solutions on the design of the player card system into the formal advice to MaxGaming to finalise design of the system. She confirmed that all that was needed was ministerial approval and a commitment of funding required to finalise the development and implement the card.

Also in November 2024, Michael Ferguson MP - now a backbencher and no longer treasurer - told the media the gambling lobby had pressured the Liberals to drop the card. He also cited that many venues were reaping enormous economic benefits of the changed licensing and taxation arrangements under the future gaming market reforms that gave venues a greater percentage of the losses. Mr Ferguson, in an ABC report, expressed concern about the misery of families, and that was in November 2024. It has always been clear where his motivations lie: trying to progress and make positive progress on this.

It appears a draft of the commissioned Deloitte report was provided to the government in the first half of 2025. In June 2025, before the final version of the Deloitte report was received, the government announced it would not introduce a player card without a national approach. In December 2025, the Deloitte Access Economics report was provided to the Tasmanian government. However, the report was not immediately released publicly.

The Liquor and Gaming Commission has never recommended the introduction of a ticket-in, ticket-out system for Tasmania and currently prohibits ATMs in gaming venues in this state. I'm saying this as background for further discussion later. However, on 23 January 2026, the Liberal government announced new 'harm minimisation measures' - and I'm putting that in quote marks, quite purposefully - which included longer closing hours for gaming areas in hotels and clubs, a ticket-in, ticket-out system, and provisions to make self-exclusion immediate and linked to facial-recognition technology. They also announced a new process for setting caps on machine numbers and that ATMs would be able to be located in venues. Also on 23 January 2026, the final Deloitte report was published on the Department of State Growth website with no announcement or comment from the government.

That's to set the scene for the conversation that we're going to have on this motion I'm bringing to our Chamber today. As I mentioned, Deloitte was commissioned - and this is, by way of background, some more background information to the Deloitte report - perhaps by the minister for Hospitality, we're not entirely sure; perhaps the government could confirm, but certainly through the Department of State Growth, Deloitte was commissioned to assess the

economic and social impacts of the government's player card, which was to be mandatory for all poker machines in Tasmania, and to have daily loss limits of \$100 per day and an annual loss limit of \$5000. Deloitte was tasked to assess the impact of introducing the player card on the Tasmanian economy, the behaviour of poker machine customers, and on the level of gambling harm in the state.

As I've already mentioned, I believe that this was done in a panicked way, with the assumption that such a report would assist in discrediting the card. They could not have been more wrong, if that was the motivation. When it came to light this report was being commissioned, the government wouldn't release the terms of reference for the report at the time, even though this Chamber passed a motion calling for them to be released. It never saw the light of day.

The motivation for commissioning the report was never particularly clear. It looks like a knee-jerk reaction at the behest of the pokies industry to try to concoct a reason to block the card from being implemented. However, on 23 January 2026, when the Deloitte report on the player card was released publicly on the Department of State Growth website, we saw no announcement from the government, even though it was commissioned through a government department and paid for, presumably, by Tasmanian taxpayers, for a purpose, originally, which has never been properly revealed. It slipped out onto the Department of State Growth website the same day that they made other announcements about other measures in an attempt to distract from it.

The Deloitte report said the player card developed for Tasmania would significantly reduce losses and harm, especially from those at moderate to high risk of gambling harm and that it would lift Tasmania's gross state product and that would deliver a net increase in jobs in this state.

Going on to some more detail from that report, as noted in the motion, I'm looking at page 11 of the report. I'm looking at 1.2.2 Approach overview. That outlines the broad approach taken for this work commissioned by the government. It outlines that a computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling was used to estimate the net economic and social impacts of the player card.

It outlines that three scenarios were modelled based on a spectrum of evidence available and to reflect different ways that behaviour may be influenced by the policy. With that background in the approach taken, there are some key findings that have been made in the report that the motion speaks to and that I'm going to outline briefly for discussion here today.

The first one is that there was a finding from the report that the pokies card developed for Tasmania would generate greater economic activity and increase jobs in Tasmania compared to the current situation. The central scenario as part of that modelling work done indicated a net increase of gross state product of around \$230 million and a net increase of over 200 jobs.

If the player card was introduced, Deloitte estimated under central scenario that these would be the outcomes: a boost to gross state product of around \$230 million and similarly an increase of over 200 jobs in this state. That is nothing to sneeze at; these are significant economic benefits to the state. The player card would reduce income for venues with poker machines, but this is offset by increases in expenditure in other sectors. Money spent on poker

machines creates very few jobs compared to the same amount being spent on virtually any other goods or services in our community. That's something that I've discussed in this place before, that \$1 million spent on poker machines, for example, generates a very few jobs, marginal jobs, compared to \$1 million spent - even if we compared it to other areas of the hospitality industry - food and beverages, for instance, or certainly retail or other sorts of goods and services generate far more jobs. Introducing the player card would improve economic activity compared to the current poker machine environment.

I found it very interesting in the report, too, for members thinking about their local areas, there's a local government area (LGA) breakdown across pages 24 and 25 of the economic impact and the net job impact. You can see for yourself that all LGAs come out quite positively or, at worst, neutrally. This player card developed for our state is a benefit around the entire state, and some particular LGAs come out very well.

Another finding from the report is that the player card developed for Tasmania, the nation-leading gold standard player card I should say, developed for Tasmania, would positively impact all industries with the exception of the EGM sector - that's the pokies industry - and all regions would have a positive or neutral economic impact. The Deloitte report found positive economic benefit from the player card would especially be felt in regional areas that have a lot of machines currently, and that's because the money that was no longer being spent on poker machines under harm scenarios would be spent in other sectors of the economy and other businesses in those areas and generate more economic activity and more jobs.

This means economic benefit would be felt by non-pokies businesses in the local government areas of, for example, Devonport - because Devonport has pokies losses of nearly \$1 million every month - Burnie, Central Coast and Waratah-Wynyard LGAs, where each of those have pokies losses of about \$500,000 every month, and the cities of Glenorchy, which, I've already mentioned, has pokies losses of close to \$2 million every month, and Launceston, where pokies losses are around \$1.5 million every month.

In all of those scenarios, the harm that is lessened, the money that moves from being spent on harmful pokies use is then spent in other parts of the economy in areas that generate better economic development and activity and greater jobs. For each of those areas, a significant proportion of a reduction in the losses to poker machines would get spent elsewhere in the economy. That would mean that there would be also, when we reduce poker machine harm, more available workers at higher productivity levels due to that reduction in gambling amongst the workforce, and particularly harmful gambling, and there would be substitution of pokie spending for the consumption of other goods and services, generating higher employment.

Similarly, the finding in this report - in relation to the gold-standard nation-leading pokies card developed for Tasmania ready to be rolled out, basically, with ministerial approval, and the only final thing needed to press go on that implementation - was that a player card would significantly reduce the poker machine gambling expenditure and harm, especially for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm. Through its modelling, Deloitte estimated the player card would reduce total gambling losses by 23 to 46 per cent.

In preparation for this motion, I provided a briefing paper to members for their reference in case they required some background information and I need to make a correction. In that briefing paper, when I was referring to this figure of 23 to 46 per cent reduction, I did mention

there that it was in relation to poker machine losses, but in fact it was total gambling losses. Nevertheless, the point remains the same. In fact, the reduction in poker machine expenditure would be in the vicinity of 27 to 58 per cent.

The Deloitte report referred to research that showed cashless gambling without loss limits generally increases losses and harm. The proposed player card's harm-minimisation features of daily, monthly and annual loss limits would be particularly effective at controlling losses and thereby reducing harm for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm.

Reducing the risk of higher levels of pokies harm would decrease the demand and the cost for health, social support, and justice and policing services, as well as improving productivity and community wellbeing. There are no negatives here. All of this is upside in relation to this nation-leading card developed for Tasmania.

A further finding in the report relates to the fact that the pokies card developed for Tasmania would reduce costs to government for delivered and associated services, including in health care, mental health support, homelessness programs, policing, courts, corrections and more. Therefore, in addition to the higher economic activity it would generate, the report shows the player card would reduce costs locally for government-associated services. Reducing poker machine losses, especially from people at risk of moderate- to high-risk gambling, reduces the costs to government and creates a more productive community.

I'm going to refer to page 37 of the report under 4.2, the heading being 'Impact of gambling harm to players and their communities':

The harms of gambling are far-reaching and extend beyond the direct financial impact on the individual gambler. The Socio-Economic Impact of Gambling (SEIG) Framework provides a guide for assessing the quantitative, qualitative, and monetary costs and benefits of gambling, covering six impact domains, including:

1. health and wellbeing,
2. economic and financial,
3. employment and education,
4. recreation and tourism,
5. legal and justice, and community and culture impacts.

These can occur sequentially or in parallel.

Note, while all these domains are associated with a cost to society or the economy, only some have been quantified regarding their impact on the economy (refer to Section 2). Categories that represent costs to the individual, or do not directly contribute to Tasmania's total economic production, or Gross State Product (GSP), are not in-scope for the CGE modelling and therefore have not been included in the impact of the reform on the economy.

That gives you the picture of the extent to which they cast the net to be assessing the benefits or otherwise here of the card, and it comes out resoundingly well.

Of particular note in relation to some of those areas of gambling-harm costs borne by our community and economy in terms of health and wellbeing, and again still on page 37 of the report, under 4.2.2, 'Health and wellbeing', it says:

Gambling is an important public health issue, with recent estimates ranking it as the third largest contributor of disability adjusted life years lost to ill-health in Victoria, following major depression and alcohol abuse and dependence.

That's quite shocking. It's the third largest contributor of disability adjusted life years lost, according to local Australian research. That's a concern. No wonder it's a cost to our health and social services sector. Also we can see, if we turn over to page 38 of the report, there's a well-understood and well-researched link between gambling addiction and harm and increased levels of family violence, and we would all understand that that's going to be something that contributes as a cost to our community, not just economically through the services and supports that are required in that space through our criminal justice system, but also through our social supports, and the human cost of anything that adds to and increases family and domestic violence.

It says here on page 38:

Gambling can be detrimental to family and spousal relationships, ranging from heightened risk of tension and stress to domestic and family violence.

It also says further down that page:

Research has shown also that problem gambling is associated with greater rates of domestic and family violence. One survey found that 55.6% of problem gamblers reported perpetrating intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months and 59.7% reported being victims of such violence.

It's a disturbing connection there. There are so many reasons that we want to genuinely be focused on effective harm minimisation when it comes to gambling, to reduce rates of gambling addiction, which makes it all the more obscene when all this government is doing is pretending to go down that path.

We also have in the report references, on page 39, to the fact that there are employment and education benefits from reducing harm to gambling. I point people, particularly in terms of education and employment for young Tasmanians, to reports from Anglicare Tasmania. I'm looking particularly at its report titled *The poker machine card. Simple as*. On page 8 of that report, where it presents in a graph that from 2021-2022 to the next year, 2022-2023, the number of people aged 18 to 24 who sought help from Anglicare Tasmania due to poker machine harm doubled. It doubled in one year. This is not an issue and a problem that is felt only by older Tasmanians. It is one that is an active and problematic issue for young Tasmanians. That is naturally going to flow through then, and have consequences when it comes to education and to employment for younger Tasmanians.

Of course our legal and justice system are impacted, and that's dealt with in the Deloitte report. It points out that there are legal and judiciary impacts from gambling, primarily relating to costs associated with criminal justice and policing, as well as costs associated with gambling-related crime. There are very clear links: people who become addicted in a poker machine addiction, and then begin to potentially commit crime, often fraud, and that often affects workplaces. When people are pursuing their addiction, it's out of their control, and they're desperate to find money to feed that addiction.

The other point that's made here in the Deloitte report about the legal system is the fact that further research demonstrates that poker machines are heavily involved in money-laundering activities. That's something that will come up a little bit later, when we're talking about the government's measures. Money laundering hasn't been a strong feature, necessarily, of our poker machine environment in Tasmania, unlike in some other states where it has been revealed there is a significant problem. However, what I'm going to suggest to you as a little preview now of what I'm going to suggest to you later, when we speak about the things the government plans to do, instead of a gold-plated card, the things that the government plans to do are actually going to expose us to a much higher risk of money laundering becoming a feature of our poker machine environment in Tasmania. That's just absolutely inexcusable, quite frankly.

To wrap up on this aspect of the motion, noting the Deloitte Access Economic, Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine EGM Reform Use in Tasmania report, I'd just like to remind the members of a few things. The report was commissioned by the government at a time when it was under pressure from the pokies industry to ditch the player card policy, and it was commissioned, I think, with the expectation of discrediting that policy. However, the report appears to then have been withheld by the government, with a significant amount of time between the draft report being provided in the first half of 2025 and the government receiving the final report in December 2025, and then the report being published on the State Growth website with no acknowledgement from the government at all in January 2026.

To me, this says the government was pretty much pulled up short when this report came back with such glowing endorsement of the card developed for our state. It would be nation-leading, and gold standard in terms of reducing harm. After their January release of this report and the government's announced measures that I will speak about in this motion as well, I asked for a briefing on the government's announced measures. During that briefing that I was provided, and I was very grateful to be provided with the briefing, I did ask about whether the findings of the Deloitte report, some of which we've just discussed now, had been considered by the Treasurer in the development of the government's announced measures.

I was told in that briefing that the Deloitte report was commissioned by State Growth, and not by the Treasurer or Treasury, and that neither the Treasurer nor Treasury had seen it. That is an astonishing revelation. We've got one part of government commissioning this report, paying for it with taxpayer dollars, on a very important topic that is actually under the responsibility of the Treasurer and Treasury. Then, when that report is provided to government, and to the department that commissioned it, State Growth, it isn't apparently shared with Treasury and the Treasurer to inform any policy and decision-making on this topic by the Treasury and the Treasurer.

I presume - and it's on the government to confirm or deny this - that Cabinet also as not briefed on the Deloitte report, and that Cabinet did not take the findings of this report into consideration when making decisions about throwing out the player card developed for our state, and adopting instead a series of spurious non-evidence-based measures that were announced in January.

It could only have been a deliberate decision by the Premier, by the Treasurer and by every cabinet member, quite frankly, to not seek a briefing on the Deloitte report and inform themselves properly of this work commissioned by this government with taxpayer money to assess the impact of the Liberal policy on a pokies player card, which at the time it was commissioned, was government policy.

So, now we have a policy that was originally announced by Michael Ferguson as treasurer in a Liberal government that was not only comprehensively researched and recommended by the independent Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission but has now been shown to be positive for our state on all fronts in a report originally commissioned to try to discredit it. A policy that was ready for the final approval decision to press go on the last phase of its implementation in late 2024. A policy that every single independent expert on this topic will confirm is gold standard in preventing and reducing harm genuinely.

It is a policy that this government, panicking under pressure and influence from the powerful pokies industry party donors, has thrown aside with no rationale able to stand up to scrutiny to justify that decision. Policy and regulatory capture of government when it comes to poker machines has always been the norm in Tasmania: blatant, bold-faced bully boy behaviour from an industry that has so much financial weight and influence to throw around. But this disgraceful backflip by the Rockliff government on a public health matter in which Tasmanian lives are at stake absolutely takes the cake. Yet, it gets worse, when we look at what the government has the gall to propose in place of the exemplary player card.

Having covered the Deloitte report briefly, but with the highlights, I'm going to now move on to part (1)(b) of the motion, which is the Tasmanian government's measures announced on 23 January 2026.

Having abandoned the evidence-based, Tasmania Liquor and Gaming Commission recommended, well-developed player card in June 2025, the Treasurer, Eric Abetz, announced in January 2026 a suite of new 'harm minimisation measures' for poker machines and their venues. I'm using inverted commas when I say 'harm minimisation measures'.

These measures were presented in a media release, and no further detail was available on them. So, I sought a briefing on the announced measures, as did, I believe, other MPs, and I received a briefing on 19 February from a Treasury staff member and an adviser from the Treasurer's office. Very little detail was able to be provided in the briefing and the Treasurer's adviser agreed to take an extensive list of questions on notice and to provide answers at a later date. I was really impressed with the engagement that I got about that, and pleased to be provided with some of those answers a little bit down the track. They are presented in a document sent back to me and it is labelled 'official'. It doesn't have the signature of the Treasurer on it the way we would expect, for example, with questions on notice coming back to us in this Chamber or questions without notice coming back to us. But because it was emailed to me with information in it and it is labelled 'official'.

Mr President, I seek leave to table the document so that it's part of this debate on the parliamentary record.

**Leave granted; document tabled.**

There are numerous questions that were taken on notice from that briefing that I received which remain unanswered and have been indicated in the document I have just tabled as requiring advice or information from Treasury or the gaming commission.

Before examining each of the government's announced measures, I do want to address some overall considerations when it comes to the government's set of measures announced, and also, from the answers I received both at the briefing and then afterwards in these questions taken on notice.

Straight off the bat, the following statement is made in the answers to my questions taken on notice that catches my eye, and that statement reads this:

The government is of the view that the package contains measures which can very reasonably be expected to reduce harm.

Now, I want to be very clear here with members: there is no basis on which the government can claim to have that expectation, reasonable or otherwise, and they have not been able to produce any evidence to back that claim of an expected reduction in harm. The new measures announced by the government were not advised by the Liquor and Gaming Commission, are not backed by evidence as being shown to reduce or prevent harm, were not consulted on publicly, and have not been assessed for their economic and social impact.

In fact, not only is there no evidence base or research to indicate these would be effective measures to reduce or prevent harm, some of the measures may well likely actively promote greater harm from pokies and introduce greater risks, for example, of money laundering.

The Treasurer also says in answers to my questions taken on notice after the briefing, and I quote:

A package of measures was announced earlier this year informing this package, which is a position of the government. Input was sought from a variety of stakeholders including the Liquor and Gaming Commission and Treasury. This input was considered by the government in coming to a decision.

That's an important sequence there, in that statement. They say input was sought and that the input was considered by the government in coming to a decision. We actually should examine that a little bit carefully, because that's misleading at best. And certainly, it has been a topic of conversation in the other place during these two sitting weeks - last week and this week. I'm not going to reflect on that, but there are matters that came up there that need to be clarified here. I'm going to seek to clarify them because, in the other place, when asked about the consultation that occurred on these measures announced by the government, there was some complete confusion.

Initially, when the Treasurer was asked about the consultation that was undertaken for these to inform the decision to adopt this range of measures that were announced, the Treasurer confirmed to the Chamber in the other place that they had consulted with three organisations: Anglicare, Hospitality Tasmania and the commissioner.

Then he went on, only to have to correct the record later that day because he had actually misspoken there, particularly in relation to the sequence of events, and he indicated he had personally consulted with three organisations prior to the Cabinet decision, but in fact it was only two prior to the decision being made by Cabinet. It was Anglicare Tasmania and Hospitality Tasmania that the Treasurer had interacted with about these measures, and that the commissioner was consulted afterwards.

Let's be really clear here. The only consultation that occurred on these measures were with Anglicare Tasmania and with Hospitality Tasmania, the peak body for the pokies industry groups that are part of the industry here.

I can guarantee you Anglicare Tasmania have been steadfast, and I believe members have had a communication today from Anglicare Tasmania, confirming their very clear view that the best and only reasonable way forward for our state when it comes to reducing harmful poker machines is to go with our well-developed, absolutely nation-leading player card with loss limits. That is the thing that Anglicare maintains a steadfast support for.

So, we can guess, surmise, that when the Treasurer went to Anglicare Tasmania prior to Cabinet making a decision to talk about this list of measures that the government subsequently announced, Anglicare Tasmania would have shared their very firm view with him. In that, I'm not seeking to verbal Anglicare Tasmania and they can certainly make it clear. I think they've been crystal clear about what their recommended and advised option is. It wouldn't have got support from Anglicare.

The most astonishing thing about that interaction in the other place was that the Treasurer confirmed he did not speak to the commissioner. The gaming commissioner is the Chair of the gaming commission, the person you generally refer to as the commissioner, and that in this state is Jenny Cranston. The gaming commissioner was not consulted, the Treasurer has confirmed, prior to Cabinet making a decision on these measures. Don't you think, of all the people in this state that you would responsibly consult with as a government and as a Cabinet you would expect to seek advice from before making a decision on such a consequential policy, don't you think that the advice you would want to see would be from your independent gaming commission, from your commissioner, the chair of that commission, to see what they thought about the potential effectiveness or otherwise of the measures being proposed to you to be decided on? That's not what happened.

We then had further confusion, though, and it's important to clarify this, because the Treasurer then had to come back the next day when he was pressed further on it to talk about who he did consult with, because he got a bit tripped up about whether he spoke to in fact the commission or the commissioner, and who in fact the commissioner might be. He mentioned by name a public servant, who is Jonathon Root. He was mentioned by the Treasurer in his answers to questions and the Treasurer suggested that that was who he was referring to when he had said he consulted with the commissioner.

I want to be clear here, and it's unfortunate when public servants are named in this place, so I'm just wanting to clarify because there could be confusion around the role that Jonathon Root has. Jonathon Root is the director of the Liquor and Gaming Branch, and he is, I believe, commissioner for Licensing. He is not the commissioner for gaming. The person we would refer to as the commissioner for gaming is the chair of the gaming commission, and that's Jenny Cranston. Therefore, when the Treasurer tries to pretend that Jonathon Root was in fact the commissioner consulted, that confuses me and concerns me even more, because in fact what we saw was consultation with potentially a public servant in the Treasury Department, Jonathon Root, around these measures, but not the gaming commissioner, the chair of the gaming commission, then that is problematic.

Where on earth did any advice from the commission come into this? It looks like it didn't come into it even after Cabinet had made the decision. It's all quite concerning.

The other thing that concerned me about answers provided is that the Treasurer seems to imply that he should get policy advice on poker machine regulatory matters and poker machine policy matters from Treasury, but not from the gaming commission. That's what he implied in the other place in his answers. That's problematic because under our legislation, the gaming commission, the chief commissioner in charge of it and the other commissioners, the gaming commission are tasked with two things under our act broadly. They're tasked with being the regulators of that industry and being responsible for setting and enforcing the regulation, but under our act they are also tasked with providing policy advice to government, both on request and also potentially even on their own motion.

That is literally a role they have under our act: to provide policy advice to government when it comes to poker machines. This is the commission that was not consulted by the Treasurer on the measures that were adopted by government and decided on by Cabinet, and every single member of Cabinet agreed to decide on those measures, ultimately, without having any advice in front of them from the gaming commission. Every member of Cabinet.

Let's go on to specifics about these announced measures. The first one I'm going to speak about is the announcement that there would be an extension of the gaming room closure period from four hours a day to seven hours per day. Currently, gaming areas of hotels and clubs have a mandatory four-hour closure every 24 hours at the time of the venue's choice. That's the minimum. It's not that they have to be open 20 hours a day, but it's permissible that they are open up to 20 hours per day, and for four hours a day there must be a mandatory closure. The reality is, of course, that when the government talks about its announced increase in that closure period and trumpets the fact that it's a 75 per cent increase from four hours to seven hours every 24 hours, the reality is that that will affect very few venues statewide, because very few venues statewide operate their gaming rooms for the full, currently allowable, 20 hours a day.

Therefore, this change is likely only to impact a very small number of venues and, quite frankly, when I tried to find out if we knew the extent of this - because if there was any proper policy development work with responsible modelling of this sort of proposal, you would think the government would have done that policy work and have an understanding of how many venues would be affected by this sort of proposal - the government, in fact, in the briefing, wasn't able to tell me whether and how many of our venues currently in the state operate at the full 20 hours a day, and how many operate less, and if so, how much less. They weren't able to identify how many venues, therefore, would be impacted by the change they're proposing to make, so that we could therefore even begin, in a very rudimentary way, to understand what

the impact of this change might be. The government certainly doesn't have any concept of what the impact of this change might be because they don't even know how many venues it's going to apply to and impact on.

The government also wasn't able to tell me whether the Liquor and Gaming Commission monitors or audits the opening hours of venues to be able to provide an indication of how many venues would be affected. They weren't able to tell me whether the commission would even have that information. That indicates to me the government has adopted this change with literally no clue as to its likely impact. They're making an assumption. They're going by the vibe of the thing. We're going to make them close, not four hours, but seven hours a day. The vibe of the thing tells us that that's going to reduce harm. That's absolute rubbish. We know literally nothing about how much harm may or may not be reduced by that measure. We don't even know how many venues that might likely impact.

Here's the thing: even if we were optimistically to think that this would impact all venues, and suddenly all venues were closed for a little longer each day, gaming areas are still allowed to be open, under this new announcement, 17 hours of every day. Gaming venues would continue to target those hours at customers at risk of experiencing harm, because that's exactly what they do now. They target the hours they know that they get players who spend the most money because they are being harmed by their gambling.

Those hours include after-school drop-off and it also includes late-night and early-morning hours. Seventeen hours a day still leaves you plenty of time to plan to target the most vulnerable people sitting in front of your machines. Because there's no prescribed same time for the closure period, customers are also then able to move from one venue to another. If one venue that they're in is about to close, another one may well time its closing hours to not directly correlate so that we get passage of poker machine users between venues.

Of course, if we were properly developing policy in this space and we were seriously contemplating this as a proposed measure, what we would ask ourselves is, 'Would it be invaluable to have a mandatory time shutdown that would apply to all venues, so every one was closed at the same seven hours a day, for example?'

Of course, that is not what the government is proposing. When I put it to them and asked them whether they would be prepared to consider such a thing, to even maximise the value of this virtually meaningless announcement and measure, the government indicated to me it's unwilling to mandate the closure period of seven hours a day. Absolute rubbish.

That's a strike one there. Trumpeting the fact that you're extending gaming room closing hours - mandatory closing hours - is virtually meaningless. The government cannot point to the impact it will have. There is no indication that it will meaningfully impact harm. You cannot call it a harm reduction measure. I don't believe our gaming commission would call it that, but the government doesn't know that because they haven't asked them. They certainly didn't ask them before deciding on the measure.

The next cab off the rank in the government's measures was that it planned to introduce a ticket-in, ticket-out (TITO) system. This would replace our current coin-based system. It's so bizarre to me to see the Treasurer refer, in his answers to my questions taken on notice and also in other circumstances, to this as if it's some improvement, as if it's some getting with the modern program, to move away from a coin-based, outdated system.

Here's the thing: one of the reasons the Tasmanian government has been able to say very regularly over the years that Tasmania has lower per-capita losses on poker machines than other states is because we have a coin-based system. It's actually a protective factor in this state, so any move to step away from our coin-based system should be absolutely, rigorously indicated by evidence that it would be a step towards greater harm reduction rather than towards vulnerability to more harm. That's not what this TITO proposal is going to do.

So, the TITO proposal apparently would work in this basic way: customers would purchase a ticket with money loaded onto it, they use it on the poker machine and they get a ticket from the machine with their balance, which they can then take to another machine or to cash in at a cashier. The government intends to introduce this system that would allow \$200 to be loaded onto a ticket and would allow for \$100 to be able to be loaded from the ticket onto the poker machine at a time.

The announcement is that it lacks any other detail, virtually, to properly explain how the TITO system would work, but what we could guess and surmise is that it is likely to operate similarly to what it does in some other jurisdictions. It's likely to operate through a vending machine: that's most commonly in use elsewhere. So, it's not going to be that you have to go to a counter to buy a ticket from a person, which, by the way, would be a more protective factor over any system, because interacting with a human in this whole process is building in a potential protective factor, but doing things entirely through a machine is not necessarily doing that.

The policy is silent on whether people would be able to buy more than one ticket at a time or whether there'd be any limit on the tickets purchased in a day, for example. If there were limits on tickets purchased, if that was imposed through this policy, there's no indication of how that would be monitored and enforced, how the system would practically work to enforce a limit. So, with no human oversight and no limit on how many tickets can be purchased, a TITO system can easily be used for money laundering, as it has been in other states with similar systems.

It can easily feed a pokies addiction very readily for people who are highly vulnerable. It's much more dangerous, potentially, than a coin-based system, and it's not something that the Liquor and Gaming Commission have advised. I would guess perhaps the government deliberately didn't seek advice from the gaming commission because they knew exactly what the gaming commission would say to them about this and other measures that have ended up on this proposed list of measures from the government.

This is not a well-indicated system. Just because we're following other states on this is not something to pat ourselves on the back about or congratulate ourselves. These other states have higher per-capita losses; these other states have far greater money laundering risks; these other states have higher levels of harm than we have here. This is looking, potentially, to be stripping away protections we've had in place here under our system that are legacy protections.

They're not perfect and I would like to see them absolutely updated with something proper, like the nation-leading player card with loss limits programmed, which is exactly what the evidence base tells us is the best outcome for our state. We shouldn't be updating our system that puts us into a space of greater risk. The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation research shows that cashless gambling, such as a TITO system, increases losses and therefore

increases risk of harm unless it's accompanied by mandatory pre-commitment or loss limits. The Treasurer says this in answers to my questions on notice after the briefing:

In relation to ticket-in, ticket-out systems (TITO), it is a point of fact that Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in the country that has not moved away from EGM use by coin only in hotels and clubs. It's proven technology in use across the country. Its introduction will allow for the modernisation of gaming systems in place in Tasmania and will go hand in hand with the use of ticket value limits and improved controls on access to cash through FRT [facial recognition technology] ensuring that TITO supports the overall harm-minimisation framework.

Absolute rubbish: there's nothing to support any of that, literally nothing. The fact that Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in the country that has not moved away from coins is, as I've said, perfectly reasonable and has been a protective factor. This technology is proven technology in use across the country: it's proven to be delivering jurisdictions that have higher levels of pokies harm and that have higher risk of money laundering. Its introduction will not allow for the modernisation of gaming systems; it will allow us to sink into the pit of greater harm that other jurisdictions are already experiencing.

It's astonishing to me that that there can be any claim that a TITO system supports overall harm-minimisation frameworks. It doesn't, and the gaming commission would tell us that and any evidence base would tell us that. The government just hasn't taken the time and has deliberately chosen not to go to the effort of creating an evidence base that supports these measures and looking for one, in order to justify them with a rationale; there is no rationale.

The TITO policy as announced would be a major change for Tasmania towards a cashless system, but it has no pre-commitment or loss limit features. The evidence is very clear that this will drive higher losses and greater harm. The Treasurer cannot pretend that limiting the amount you can load onto a machine is in any way equitable or comparable to having a programmed loss limit. That is simply not the case, and if there's no limit on the number of tickets I can get, I can literally go to the vending machine and get myself \$5, \$10, \$200 worth of tickets, \$1000, \$2000. I can get those and I can go and sit down at machines and I can start using them. Yes, I might have to load on again after I've used my first \$100; there's nothing stopping me then going through all of those tickets and losing all of that money in one go. There is nothing remotely comparable when it comes to harm minimisation in what the Treasurer is proposing with this TITO system, and what would be delivered under a player card with programmed loss limits. The Treasurer claims this in answers to my questions on notice after the briefing:

The introduction of TITO must be viewed in the context of the full suite of measures, which includes limits on the value of tickets, improved controls on access to cash and clearer oversight from the Liquor and Gaming Commission, to ensure that the introduction of TITO occurs within a strong harm minimisation framework.

Again: utter rubbish, just rubbish. We do not have a strong harm-minimisation framework. We've had one of the strongest in the country and that's protected us, but here we are, eroding it. Here we are, deliberately turning our back on it. The introduction of TITO

erodes features of our harm-minimisation system that, paltry though it is, we do have in place in Tasmania.

The government is unable to provide any evidence or modelling demonstrating the impact of introducing this TITO. They haven't modelled it. They don't know what to expect as an impact. Maybe it's the vibe of the thing again. It's nonsense to point to clearer oversight from the Liquor and Gaming Commission, which the Treasurer does there in his answer to my question. Apparently, this will deliver clear oversight. How? There's absolutely no evidence to back that up; and if so, clearer oversight of what, specifically, and what exactly is the impact that will deliver? How exactly would that be linked to harm reduction? None of that policy work or evidence base has been presented because it hasn't been done.

By the way, they're using the Liquor and Gaming Commission's name in vain there, I believe, since they haven't even asked the commission about the role that it will play in that. We knew that they hadn't asked them about it, certainly in developing and deciding on these measures. Let's be really clear: the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission is an independent statutory entity in that sense, but it has to do what it's told, basically. It works within very narrow parameters imposed on it by our legislation and by government policy directives that are given to it. So, when the Treasurer says this in answers to my questions taken on notice:

The commission, who are required to foster responsible gambling behaviour, will have a significant role in making implementation decisions regarding TITO and the use of FRT in venues.

Well, that's only dependent on the government giving them a direction with the scope, and empowerment to do that. If the government doesn't give them a direction that's appropriately configured to give them the freedom and availability to independently do that, then they're constrained from doing it, and what we will get is a commission having to, within parameters provided by government, design this system.

It's absolute nonsense to pretend they're going to have free rein, the commission that is, to go and make this some whiz-bang great dinky-di system. The commission have already made it patently clear again and again that, in their view, it is a player card with programmed loss limits that is the right system for this state and that they spent a number of years developing and had on the verge of being implemented.

Experts confirm that our current coin-based system has a far lower risk of money laundering and a player card with loss limits has zero risk of money laundering. While the Treasurer says, in answer to my questions taken on notice:

While no government position has been taken at this stage on data handling or ticket validity, operational decisions on TITO will be determined by the commission, including controls that address money laundering risks.

The commission, if asked, I believe, would readily tell government that the best way to remove money-laundering risks entirely is to introduce the developed player card with programmed loss limits. They've been very clear that's an absolute rock-solid benefit of a player card. If Tasmania is to move to a cashless system for pokies, the player card system is vastly superior to a TITO system, both for harm minimisation and for money-laundering risk.

The current cap on electronic gaming machines for hotels and clubs is 2,350. The number of machines currently installed sits at 2,274. That was on 30 June 2025. That brings us to the next measure the government is proposing, which is the setting of new caps on statewide on poker machine numbers. The government is allowing hotels and clubs until 30 June this year to apply for licences to reach the cap, because we've been under the cap the entire time, we've had a cap. After 30 June this year, a new cap will be set at whatever the number of machines installed at that time is in the state. Fair enough. No worries. We've never hit the cap anyway. By all means, let's make the cap whatever the number of machines is on 30 June this year. They then say the cap may then gradually reduce over time because as venues potentially relinquish their machines, with every second machine relinquished, that will be removed from the available pool of machines and, over time, incrementally, that may well reduce the cap of machines.

It's important to note here that this is another measure that the government is saying they expect to deliver harm-minimisation results. They have absolutely, literally no reason on which to expect that. There is no evidence to tell them that marginally reducing the cap we currently have on machines will have any tangible impact on harm, on pokies losses and on the impact of pokies in the state.

It's important to note that fewer machines do not necessarily mean fewer losses or less harm. There is not a simple relationship between the number of machines and pokies losses. It's simplistic to talk about natural attrition of machine numbers as harm minimisation. It simply isn't. Especially not if it is only very, very small reductions, which is most likely under this measure. It's fine. There's no reason not to do it. By all means, let's lower our cap to the number of machines we have on 30 June. If over time we have marginal decreases in the number of machines as machines may be relinquished and we take every second one of those out of the pool, great. No reason not to do that, but there's zero evidence to support that being described as harm minimisation. Zero evidence to say that will impact on the level of losses in our state.

One of the ways we know that - I put this in the briefing paper I provided to members - is that we can look at the number of poker machines in the state and just look potentially at the change in number of machines. For example, from 2019 to 2025, we can see that across that time, when it comes to pokies in hotels and clubs, there were fewer venues with pokies for a start, and there were fewer machines between 2019 and 2025, and losses went up in that time in terms of just raw numbers - the same for in casinos: across the years, from 2019 to 2025, there were fewer machines in casinos and yet losses went up in raw numbers. It's quite a dramatic increase, actually, in casinos. That's the thing.

There is no actual discernible correlation between losses and harm and the number of machines. We're only talking about potentially small changes. Again, no evidence there, must be the vibe of the thing, certainly sounds good, fewer machines on the face of it just sounds great. If you know nothing about the topic - and let's face it, given that the Cabinet didn't receive any advice or policy work on this from its Liquor and Gaming Commission - from the commission and the commissioners that are experts in this and the independent experts under legislation tasked with providing policy advice to the government - given the Cabinet didn't seek their advice, maybe all they had to go on was the vibe of the thing, and on the face of it, it seemed like a sensible measure. Well, it won't hurt, but there's no way they can say it's going to help.

Moving on to another measure announced, and that's the introduction of immediate self-exclusion available in venues via a QR code, and facial-recognition technology as part of the exclusion system. This has been previously announced, so it's not a new measure that was announced in January 2026, but it was a reiteration of a previously announced measure. The introduction of a self-exclusion system for poker machines is really an update on the current system we have and, by all means, we should be looking to update our exclusion system. This would have customers using a QR code in venues to put themselves onto the exclusion register quite promptly, which may well be a good thing. It does take a few steps currently and that could definitely be improved. The person would be entered onto a database and that would be linked to new mandatory facial recognition technology, which would identify excluded customers if they entered a gaming room.

Let's be really clear, and just for background: exclusion mechanisms are an important part of customer protection from poker machine harm for sure, but they largely rely on customers acknowledging they have a problem and deciding to take action themselves. Just for clarity - because we have a lot of really strong evidence on this from many, many years of research - evidence tells us that only about one in 10 people with an addiction to poker machines seeks help for that addiction. Only about one in 10 are at the point that they identify they have a problem and need to seek help. It's only a small subset of those people, those one in 10, who then participate in exclusion schemes. It's important to note that exclusion schemes are a marginal aspect of protecting people at a time of extremity, basically, in their struggle with an addiction to poker machines.

The other thing I'll point out, and it's really important to note this: a player card programs loss limits. A player card, though, also functions in and of itself as an exclusion scheme. You don't have to have a separate system. A player card provides an exclusion scheme because an excluded persons card is simply deactivated and as ID is required to set up a new card, they're not able to get a new card while they're excluded because they're in the system. We have a gold-standard, absolutely expert-recommended way to operate a highly effective exclusion scheme without the need for facial-recognition technology and without the need for extra measures, all built into a player card.

In the absence of a player card, a better-functioning exclusion scheme is worthwhile to invest in, but in terms of minimising pokies harm as stated by the gaming commission, it will only be of marginal impact. Exclusion schemes, as I said, apply to those at the extremity of an addiction. Let's be really clear: exclusion schemes don't prevent harm. Exclusion schemes don't prevent the development of an addiction. All they do is provide some better help to people who are at the extremity of things.

On 30 June 2025 there were 392 people in Tasmania in the exclusion scheme. With such a major focus on the exclusion system for harm-minimisation outcomes, rather than a system-wide measure such as a player card with loss limits, the government is basically guaranteeing in that binary choice to go with an exclusion scheme with facial-recognition technology instead of a player card with loss limits. They are guaranteeing that thousands of Tasmanians who use poker machines will miss out on consumer protections and empowerment that would be provided by the card, and will only be providing marginal support to people who are already at the extremity of being harmed. It's absolutely the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Even then, it's only picking up the people who are on death's door, not the people who maybe just have a few broken limbs. It's not the fence at the top of the cliff, which is exactly what the card would be.

It's interesting because the Deloitte report, I point members to page 35, summarises that fact that gambling harm is not restricted to only problem gamblers, or people at that very extreme end of an addiction. It references a fairly recent Victorian study, which found that 85 per cent of gambling harm was attributed to low-risk and moderate-risk gamblers. It's definitely not likely that those people would be at the extremity of their addiction and using an exclusion scheme. Eighty-five per cent of gambling harm is not going to be touched at all by an exclusion scheme. Tweaking and upgrading, and adding facial-recognition technology, it's not going to help it at all.

To clarify some terms I've just used there, when I talked about low-risk or moderate-risk gamblers: those terms don't mean that the risk is low for people who are in low-risk categories. It means that they are already exhibiting signs of harmful gambling behaviour. They're already in the lowest of the risk categories is what that means. Then there is a moderate category; that is where people are at the moderate risk, and then there is a problem gambling category above that. Nevertheless, there is harm occurring across all of those, and 85 per cent of it is in the low and moderate categories.

When I asked the government, through the briefing and in questions on notice, if they would commit to an independent evaluation of the new Tasmanian gambling exclusion scheme and the facial-recognition technology system at some period after implementation, the answer was no. No, not interested to see how it's going to work out, not interested to track how effective it may have been or may not have been.

The answer provided to me pointed instead to the fact that we have our periodic Social and Economic Impact Study of gambling in Tasmania (SEIS). Which is a valuable, broad piece of research that is done here; it used to be every three years, now it's every five. But our SEIS will not function as an evaluation or a review of the new exclusion scheme system and FRT system that they're developing. That should be, and would be, required to be reviewed and evaluated separately, and with a particular term of reference to make sure that we're actually measuring what impact, if any, that's having.

Surely if we're putting this new system in place, we would want to know how it's going, and we'd probably want to look ahead and know whether we can improve it further. But no, not intended.

It's worth mentioning here - and members may or may not be aware of this - but the pokies industry here in Tasmania is already using facial-recognition technology for monitoring exclusion in some venues. The commission hasn't approved the current system because it isn't within rules that are currently available under our system, but the government states that if there's nothing that they're doing that doesn't comply with current rules, then it's allowable.

The problem is that there are no rules specific to facial-recognition technology use in pokies venues currently, so there's no real guide on what is being done, and what impact it might have. I did ask at my briefing whether anyone had checked if the current use of facial-recognition technology by pokies venues in Tasmania complies with privacy laws, and the answer is: not that the government is aware of. No-one's checked that. I asked who would check whether the use complies with current privacy laws and there was no firm answer there either. We're not really sure who would check that.

Currently, we've got an experimental use of facial-recognition technology in pokies venues in this state, with no rules guiding it, no-one checking on whether it's complying with current privacy laws. We're apparently modelling that around a South Australian approach, but I asked: how many venues do we know of that are actually currently using this? We don't really know for sure, maybe 20. However, I've also heard from other sources that it's maybe as many as half the venues in our state doing that. It's not known.

I asked for a description of what the current use was for facial-recognition technology in venues. The way it was described to me was like this: gaming rooms have two entryways, each has a camera on it so that when people walk through into the gaming area, through either entryway, they are scanned by the camera. If that person is on that venue's internal exclusion register - because that's the one that they're linking it to at the moment - if that person is on that register and they walk past, the camera scans their face and they're flagged by the system, and then there's a flashing light and an alarm that sounds probably in the area of the coin operator where the staff member would be.

I was quite shocked to hear this description of what's currently in use in venues: that there is a scanning of someone as they enter a venue and then an alarm and flashing light go off. To me, that system which is in place currently with no rules around it, no design features that have been informed by our gaming commission, has the real potential to cause trauma, to cause shame, to cause further harm to the excluded person who might be involved. Remember, there is literally no oversight or monitoring of that current system because it doesn't really exist within our current rules.

**Ms Rattray** - Through you, Mr President, I would respectfully ask the honourable member if you would move that the debate stand adjourned.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. I'll finish this little section. I'll pull up stumps before I go to the next section.

The other thing that disturbs me about the fact that we are currently using completely unregulated facial-recognition technology in our venues and are proposing to build it into a system of exclusion, is that we have businesses such as casinos and hardware chains and other retail chains who have been found to use facial-recognition technology for marketing purposes in their venues. There's already been a landmark decision in 2024 from the Australian Privacy Commissioner about the use of facial-recognition technology in a large retail outlet, with questions raised about invasion of privacy and about civil liberties. The government's announced policy on facial-recognition technology, just to be really clear and I did ask this, does not prohibit or constrain venues from using facial-recognition technology installed as part of the exclusion scheme for other purposes such as marketing. There are no rules about that at the moment and it's not necessarily anticipated there will be. It's a big question mark that hangs over it.

Before I move on to the last few areas that I've got to discuss around the government's measures, noting the time, Mr President, I move -

That the debate stand adjourned.

**Debate adjourned.**

## SUSPENSION OF SITTING

[6.57 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the sitting be suspended until the ringing of the division bells.

**Sitting suspended from 6.57 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.**

## MOTION

### **Deloitte Access Economics Report: Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform Use in Tasmania - Consideration and Noting**

**Resumed from above (page 93).**

[8.15 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President. I'm pleased to resume my contribution on my motion, No. 15 on the Notice Paper. We've been discussing part (b) of the motion, which is going through a list of 'harm minimisation measures' - in inverted commas - for poker machine regulation announced by the government on 23 January. The one that I was up to before the break was related to the allowing of ATMs to be placed in gaming venues. Let me speak a little bit about that one.

The government, according to its announcement, plans to allow pokies venues to host ATMs onsite under the condition that they're fitted with facial-recognition technology and have a \$400 limit set for withdrawals every 24 hours. Let's be very clear: there is literally no policy rationale for this measure whatsoever. No policy rationale. This would have been at the direct request of the industry. They've been trying to get permission to put ATMs in pokies venues for years. They were incredibly upset when it was disallowed for that to happen. They've been trying for years, and here is the government absolutely caving and giving in to industry.

No-one else would have recommended that this measure be adopted as part of a suite of measures. There is no research, no policy work, no modelling that would've indicated this allowing ATMs in venues is an appropriate step to take - or what impact that could or couldn't have on harm reduction from pokie machines in this state. Zero. I would suggest, confidently, that there is no way the gaming commission and commissioners would have recommended or advised this as a measure to adopt. In fact, I suspect they would have been horrified when they learnt of it. I would feel confident in suggesting that the gaming commissioners would strongly advise against this, based on their previous decisions in this area when it comes to regulating poker machines and poker machine venues.

Access to cash is clearly a risk factor and that is a basis on which ATMs have been banned from venues for many, many years. Did the government ask the gaming commissioners about this measure before deciding to adopt it? No, the Treasurer has confirmed that the gaming commissioners were not consulted prior to a Cabinet decision. Nor would I suggest - again, with absolute confidence - Anglicare Tasmania would have suggested or advised that this ATM measure be pursued. Quite the opposite on that front, too. I think there is zero chance that Anglicare would have said this was a way to go, that this would have anything but a negative

impact when it comes to pokies harm in this state. I don't presume to verbal the commissioners, or Anglicare, I'm basing that off their previous positions clearly stated on these matters. They are quite able to disabuse me of this if it's not correct.

This is definitely yet another example of a government capitulating to industry demands to serve industry's best interests and to literally do nothing when it comes to harm minimisation. ATMs have been prohibited from Tasmanian gaming venues for many, many years, because under our current coin-based system, ready access to cash on the premises increases losses and harm. The only access to cash in venues currently is through EFTPOS, and that has been limited to \$200 per day.

It's interesting, just as a side note: I don't frequent pokies venues. I make a point not to, but the last time, a number of years ago now, I was having a meal in a venue that had poker machines, what I experienced, and I presume it is common practice in pokies venues, is that when I went to order my meal and pay for it, I was asked, 'Would you like cash out as well?' When I got up later to get a drink at the bar, I was asked, when I paid for the drink, 'Would you like cash out as well?' Now that looks to me, very much like McDonald's model of upselling: 'Would you like fries with that?'

So, when you are in a pokies venue and you're buying a meal or you're buying a drink, you're asked, 'Would you like cash out as well?', which is basically, 'Would you like pokies with that?' That's what that means in that venue. Absolutely disgusting - the pushing towards getting cash out in order to spend in poker machines in the venue. That's the current system: EFTPOS limited to \$200 per day - thank goodness there's a limit there.

It is not clear whether the proposed TITO system that the government is putting forward is going to be moving us completely away from cash - whether, for example, the vending machine dispensing the tickets will take cards or cash or both when you are purchasing your tickets. Who knows? There is no detail because the policy work hasn't been done.

If ATMs are to be allowed into venues, it should not be until a complete switch away from any cash-based system to ideally a card-based system, which, of course, as on every other front, a player card system absolutely gets rid of the risk here. It would not matter if there was an ATM on the venue if we had a card-based system, I don't think. This is the situation where we are looking at any other option being likely to be increasing harm. The only way this proposal to introduce ATMs to venues can be regarded as remotely safe is if we were to go to that card-based system.

It is also quite astonishing because there really hasn't been much thought that I observed in the briefing I had and the questions I asked to how this was all going to intersect with each other. So, is it \$400 at the ATM and \$200 at EFTPOS or do we need to confine it to \$400 across the two systems? Is it then going to be \$600 across both systems? I'm not quite sure; it probably will be though. It will probably be \$600 you can access now in a venue through both those systems which, as I said, just opens us up to greater harm to be inflicted on Tasmanians in these venues.

There is no rationale for ATMs to be placed into venues other than they have been requested by the industry, presumably because there is an advantage to them. There's an advantage to them probably in their pokies business. There are probably other advantages to them in their businesses as well, no doubt.

The final measure in the government's list of announced measures on 23 January is related to the previously announced government policy to provide funding to Hospitality Tasmania to employ three gaming officers statewide. This is not a new measure announced; it is just a reiteration of a previously announced measure. These roles are stated to have an educative and support function - working with venue staff to improve the ability of venues to manage their obligations, including the challenge of responding to people with signs of harmful gambling and addiction.

Apparently, this is based on a model used in South Australia. Although, in the briefing that I had, the government's representatives couldn't identify why this model was chosen in answer to a question taken on notice at the briefing, the answer that came back from the Treasurer claims this, and I quote:

South Australia's model provides a practical example of how gaming care officers can operate effectively alongside existing regulatory frameworks. Their experience demonstrates that those roles can support venue staff, improve awareness of gambling harm indicators and strengthen referral and support pathways.

But the problem about that is that the government cannot point to any specific evidence of those claims. Has the presence of gaming officers in South Australia been demonstrated to reduce harm in any way whatsoever? I don't believe so. I am happy to have it pointed out to me, but I don't believe that has been demonstrated.

When they say that it operates effectively alongside existing regulatory frameworks, I'm sure it does. Regulatory frameworks consistently across our country, except in Western Australia, fail to reduce harm, fail to protect consumers at poker machines. And so, if these gaming officers work seamlessly alongside that existing failing system when it comes to harm minimisation, I'm not surprised that what we are going to see here is absolutely no impact from these officers once they're in place.

Victoria has had similar liaison officers as a model in that state, and there is no evidence there that this has helped reduce pokies harm, no evidence. It's not clear why these roles are not attached to the gaming commission, for example, rather than the peak industry body. It looks like a little gift of some extra staffing to the peak industry body just to help them out, maybe?

Apparently, the rationale I have heard is that you cannot put them with the gaming commission because the gaming commission is doing its regulatory role of the sector. We could not have it doing a capacity-building, training or support role as well, which is what these officers are supposed to be. I think that is rubbish. I think we have lots of other instances where there are entities responsible for both of those things. You just create separate roles and have different areas of operation and reporting within your organisation to deal with that.

When it comes to identifying and responding to people exhibiting signs of harmful gambling and addiction, our industry utterly fails at that, and it's hard not to think that that's just a built-in design feature rather than an anomaly or something that's being done accidentally. It's not hard to see signs of harmful gambling when people are lining up at 8 a.m. in the morning outside your venue, that's a sign right there. How many people do you think get turned away at the door at that time, which would be responsible service of gambling? I cannot go to a bar

with signs of intoxication and be served alcohol, but I can absolutely exhibit flagrant signs of gambling harm in a gaming venue here and be served gambling products - absolutely, that happens every day in this state.

The government has stated an intention to review this initiative of gaming officers after three years of it being implemented. It has confirmed this will be an independent review but it has not indicated the measures on which it would be assessed as successful or otherwise, or what it would be evaluated against. It is puzzling to me why we would be readily committing to reviewing this measure but completely objecting to the idea of evaluating and reviewing the new revamped exclusion scheme and facial-recognition system that they have been putting in place. Why does this warrant an evaluation and review after three years and the other system doesn't, given the other one is much more essential to the actual experience of consumers who are interacting with our poker machine industry? Maybe it's because an evaluation of this will somehow be helpful to the industry, no doubt. They will get a pat on the back from it after three years.

Mr President, that's the list of measures there in the motion under (1)(b), the government's purported harm minimisation suite of measures, which I absolutely refute as having any real, meaningful relationship to genuine harm minimisation. Certainly not harm prevention, absolutely marginal at best.

There are a few questions we should ask ourselves about this suite of measures. One is, who asked for it? Who asked for that measure to be put in place? I can guarantee you on every single one it would be industry, and I think on every single one you would not have any other credible stakeholder coming from another perspective, whether it's advocates in the gambling space, whether it's researchers, whether it's independent entities like the gaming commission - no-one else would have asked for these measures.

We have to ask ourselves: what's the evidence base for it? I have spoken to that on each of them. There is none that meaningfully says they will be effective. We have to ask ourselves if there was consultation with our gaming commission on any of these. I don't believe there was. And we have to ask who is going to benefit when none of these work to reduce harm, and the answer to that is really clear: it's the industry.

We would also ask ourselves: how on earth could any Cabinet be presented with this suite of measures to approve with absolutely nothing to back it up and inform that decision to say this is a responsible way forward, and then pass them? What Cabinet could do that?

The next part of the motion is a simple part noting Tasmania's annual poker machine losses for 2024-25 and that those losses totaled \$193,908,165, which, by my calculations, is a decade-high level of losses in this state. I am going to add to that because I've just had a quick look now at the year-to-date figures. There are monthly figures provided on the Treasury website and for 2025-26, so far on the monthly numbers coming through, by my estimation we are going to land over \$200 million in losses this year. That's what we're tracking for, really clearly. That's going to be horrifying. I don't think we've been north of \$200 million for a very long time when it comes to pokies losses in this state. That's the trajectory that we're on. It's an upward trajectory; it's not plateauing trajectory, or a downward trajectory, like it was in the decade leading into COVID. We are on an upward trajectory. This is an issue that is only having increasing urgency to be properly addressed in this state, which is all the more horrifying then to think about what the government is proposing to do.

Most of the measures announced by the government have nothing to do with harm minimisation; they're likely to potentially increase harm, in fact. By comparison, the player card with its mandatory loss limits, its effective built-in self-exclusion, its provision of real-time and accumulative data to the customer, as well as to the state, would provide effective customer protections and empowerment - empowerment of the consumer. It would be effective in protecting us against money laundering. The evidence tells us that the pokies card with loss limits is vastly better than any individual or cumulative measures that the government is putting forward here.

The last part of the motion calls on the government to confirm two things. They're really straightforward, so this is a completely uncontroversial motion in and of itself, because we are just noting things, and people can provide their own reflections on the things we are noting. I've done that in my contribution. People won't necessarily agree with me; they will have their own reflections to make, but we are reflecting and noting a few things. This is the call at the end, calling on the government to confirm whether, one, modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the government-announced measures and, two, whether prior to the decision to adopt the measures, the government obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on the effectiveness of the announced measures to prevent or reduce harm from pokie machines.

To prevent potential technical quibbling, I think it is clear in the second one that what is meant by obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission - the gaming commission overseen by the three commissioners, including chief commissioner Jenny Cranston - was advice obtained from that gaming commission, not necessarily just people who happen to be located in Treasury somewhere near the gaming commission - or responsible, for, perhaps, administrative oversight of some of the staff who work for the gaming commission.

These are just two things to confirm. It should be really easy for the government to confirm it. They could do it in their contribution today, and then that's done and dusted in terms of responding to the motion. That's why the motion is not remotely controversial to support. In fact, since I put this motion forward, some more information has come to light about the confirmation of some details. So, we already have most of that on the public record. However, I would like that to be confirmed here by the government, in their contribution, on this parliamentary record, because I think that it should be important for that to be very clear.

My assertion has been, all the way through, that there's no modelling that has been done on the social and economic impact of these announced measures. None, and they've been adopted in the complete absence of advice from the Tasmanian gaming commissioners, on the effectiveness of the measures to prevent or reduce harm from pokie machines. Absolutely, that's the confirmation that I'm looking for.

As I make my way towards drawing to a conclusion, let me sum this up. Pokie machines can be made less addictive and less harmful. We know exactly how to do that. The Rockliff government continues to purposefully choose not to make pokie machines less addictive and less harmful. For a brief time, that was not the case. When the policy to introduce a pokie machine player card with programmed loss limits was adopted and development of the player card was underway, Tasmania was taking a nation-leading, evidence-based, expert-advice path on preventing and reducing addiction and harm from pokie machines. That is now even more thoroughly confirmed by the government-commissioned Deloitte report, published in January this year.

However, this Rockliff government and every member of the Cabinet who approved that abandonment of the player card turned away from the proven, positive, life-saving approach of the player card. They have thrown it in the bin and adopted in its place a farcical list of measures that will not, in any meaningful way, prevent addiction or harm from poker machines. This list of measures is not based on any research, policy development work, advice from the independent gaming commissioners or credible evidence. The social and economic impact of these measures has not been modelled, and the government has not indicated any intention to do such modelling, despite the fact they insisted the player card couldn't continue without that modelling being done, which was the reason given for the Deloitte report to be commissioned in the first place.

The Rockliff government and every member of the Cabinet who approved the abandonment of the evidence-based, independently proven player card has done so at the behest of the vested interests of the pokies industry, because other than those vested interests from the industry, there are literally no other stakeholders, independent experts or representative groups that would have suggested, requested or advised the abandonment of the card and the switch to the flawed measures announced.

The pokies industry is a major donor to the Liberal Party; that is a matter of fact, most recently having provided a massive donation of \$217,000 at last year's state election. It is literally impossible not to connect those dots, because it could not be more blatantly obvious. This is state capture by vested interests, pure and simple. State capture is a type of systemic political corruption in which private interests significantly influence a state's decision-making to their own advantage. With its capitulation and coming to heel to the pokies industry, the Rockliff Liberal government has provided a textbook example of state capture.

We have a clearly understood, documented and studied public health issue of addiction to poker machines which is harming thousands of Tasmanians. It's destroying lives; it's crippling futures at considerable cost to our state at a time of budget crisis. We know exactly how to address this public health issue and the harm caused, at comparatively very little cost to the public purse: the player card with programmed loss limits is the solution. This Rockliff government, and every minister in it, is deliberately choosing to throw away that policy to abandon the thousands of Tasmanians affected and the thousands more who will continue to become addicted into the future. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the abandonment of the player card, no trigger to do so, other than what we can surmise to be the direct request or demand of the vested interests of the pokies industry.

In addition to the mountain of existing evidence, the Deloitte report provides every reason: social, economic, health, community; every reason to stick with the policy of introducing a player card with programmed loss limits. Instead, replacement measures have been doctored up at the direction of the pokies industry and announced with no evidence whatsoever to back them as the best way forward. In fact, so little policy work has been done on those announced measures that the centrepiece of it all, the TITO system, has virtually no detail available on the specifics of its features. Now, not only is there no evidence to show the announced measures will make any meaningful improvement, but the evidence also broadly indicates some of the measures are likely to create greater harm than our current system.

If this wasn't costing Tasmanian lives and futures every day, we would say this was a farcical, inept joke; but it is far too cruel for that, because the Rockliff government and every Cabinet minister has bent to the will of donor vested interests at the expense of evidence-based

public health policy. Here is what we can guarantee as a direct result of preventable pokies harm: there will continue to be Tasmanian children who will go hungry, who will be exposed to higher levels of domestic violence, who will have their families broken apart, whose families will become homeless and be added to our housing waiting list, who will develop their own mental health and trauma issues, and struggle to stay engaged at school and build towards their own future.

Here is the cruellest part: those children will grow up with higher levels of stress and trauma, and they will be more likely to live in lower socio-economic suburbs where pokies venues are concentrated, both of which will significantly increase the risk that they have of developing an addiction to poker machines as an adult. That is what we can guarantee as a result of the choice made by Premier Rockliff and his Cabinet ministers. By the way, the Labor Party policy is absolutely no better. The Labor Party is equally, if not more, captured by the pokies industry and operating under its direction when it comes to pokies policy; but it doesn't have to be this way. Instead, the Rockliff government, with the support of the Labor Party, could continue the policy of introducing a player card with programmed loss limits, which evidence tells us will be highly effective in preventing and reducing a significant proportion of the addiction and harm Tasmanians experience from poker machines. The choice is there to make. There is still time to do the right thing here.

I implore both the Rockliff government and every Cabinet minister in it to throw off the shady influence of pokies-vested interests which taints this government and this opposition, get back on the right side of history and continue implementing the player card that we had developed for our state, that was gold-plated and nation-leading.

On that note, I ask members to support this motion.

[8.41 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Hobart) - Thank you, Mr President. I don't intend to make a particularly long contribution on this notice of motion. I thank the honourable member for Nelson for bringing it forward and commend her on her many years of advocating for disadvantaged Tasmanians who are blighted by the presence of this scourge in their communities and in some communities like Glenorchy, which I used to represent as the member for Clark. There was the golden mile, which featured poker machines from one end of parts of Glenorchy to the other, and they were specifically located there, of course, in some of our most disadvantaged areas with the explicit purpose of taking money out of the pockets of some of our poorest people.

As I listened to the honourable member for Nelson's contribution, I felt a powerful sense of déjà vu all over again, because this is the same human tragedy that's been played out on this island since the first exclusive casino licence was handed out to the Farrell family in 1972, I think it was. Since then, there's been a rotating cycle of major party governments who have given the industry everything they've wanted. I believe Labor handed out the monopoly deed for EGMs and then it was a Liberal government under Ray Groom that allowed their proliferation into pubs and clubs.

More recently, in the days of former premier Peter Gutwein, the deed was set to expire, the monopoly deed, that blight on this state. We were given an opportunity to break free from this social cancer with the expiry of the monopoly deed, and certain vague assurances were made that it would be an open and transparent process.

I can't remember all the details of the betrayal, but there certainly was one because Peter Gutwein came into parliament after the expiry of the deed and effectively told us that there'd be a whole new arrangement and there would be poker machines in pubs and clubs across this island in perpetuity. There's no monopoly deed that comes to an end; there's just a new arrangement where these contracts just roll over and go on and on.

**Ms Webb** - Member, you'll remember that that whole policy was written by industry and tabled during the 2017 future gaming markets inquiry as a submission from the industry. The government just picked that up and took it to the 2018 election - you'll remember.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's right. Thank you for that interjection because I was about to go through the post-traumatic-stress-disorder feeling of the 2018 state election. That, more than any other election in the state's history, was defined and funded by the gambling industry. For the first time, on this issue under Labor leader Rebecca White, we had Labor prepared to take a principled stand on poker machines to remove them from pubs and clubs. We had the Liberals captured and craven to the pokies industry, and therefore the 2018 state election saw millions and millions of dollars poured into supporting the Liberals and attacking Labor and the Greens. The first advertising started in the Boxing Day Test in late 2017 - the first, effectively, pre-election advertising started - and there was a massive campaign targeting Labor and the Greens because we had a principled position of getting poker machines out of pubs and clubs.

We know what the result of the 2018 state election was. We know that, as a result of their support for the Liberals during the 2018 state election campaign, not long after that election, the Tasmanian Hospitality Association received an uplift in funding of some \$6 million over four years. That was their reward for all the support that they had given to elect a Liberal government. Thereafter, the rot has become entrenched. What happened to the Tasmanian Labor Party? Well, they learned a hard lesson and didn't have the backbone to stick to their principles, and so they abandoned that policy. Then in the 2021 state election, what we discovered was that the Tasmanian Hospitality Association had written to the Tasmanian Labor Party and effectively dictated terms to them about what their position would be on gambling and on electronic gaming machines, in particular.

It has been the industry here - whatever characters make it up - that's been calling the shots for more than 50 years. It's the people we represent who have been, in some cases, broken, demoralised, impoverished and sent mad because of that state capture of both the major parties on this island by the gambling industry. It continues to this day.

When the future gaming markets legislation went through the House of Assembly in 2022 under then treasurer Michael Ferguson, it was an extremely long debate in the House of Assembly and I distinctly remember Dr Woodruff and I, and Kristie Johnston, as the Independent member for Clark, going through all the clauses in the bill and giving the then treasurer a very hard time about the fact that this new policy of proliferation into pubs and clubs and uncertainty over harm minimisation measures would inflict harm in our communities. I remember the then Treasurer's discomfort at the fact of the harm that would be caused by that legislation. That discomfort was not aided by the fact that we read to him submissions from church leaders - and particularly church leaders in his community - calling on the government to implement effective harm minimisation. If it was going to do this and allow poker machines in pubs and clubs and casinos in perpetuity, then it needed to have effective harm minimisation measures.

The minister at the time, the treasurer, made a very solemn commitment to the House through his discomfort that he would be working too hard towards a strong, robust and evidence-based harm minimisation system for Tasmania. The consequence of that was a commitment to nation-leading card-based pre-commitment to help - in his words - 'problem gamblers'. Effectively, they're gambling addicts. He proudly stated - and it was something to be proud of, despite the perfidy of the legislation following the deed:

The Tasmanian Liberal government is leading the nation in the area of gambling harm minimisation and is strengthening measures to further reduce problem gambling. I am pleased to announce the state government's response to the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission's report into harm minimisation technologies for EGMs in Tasmanian hotels, clubs and casinos could minimise gambling harms. We support the commission's recommendation to implement a statewide player card gaming system with pre-commitment and cashless gaming. The government also supports the commission's view that facial recognition technology is not an effective tool for wider prevention of harm in gaming venues.

And if you go to the Tasmanian government response to the Liquor and Gaming Commission's report to the Treasurer on its 'investigation of harm-minimisation technologies, facial recognition and player card gaming', the first recommendation from the commission was implementation of a mandatory, registered card for EGMs in all Tasmanian hotels, clubs and casinos. The registered card system should operate as follows: require registration to participate, a single card issued to each player with a PIN, you can have guest cards, be cashless with funds loaded onto cards using cash or debit cards via EFTPOS only at a cashier desk; provide messaging about player activities such as money lost or won and time spent at EGMs, and there in the middle column was the government's position: agree. The commitment from the government:

The government will introduce a player card gaming framework for all hotels, clubs and casinos in Tasmania requiring a registered card to play EGMs anywhere in Tasmania.

Then the recommendation around facial-recognition technology, which the commission was pretty damning of, because there's no evidence to support it as a harm-minimisation measure. The commission says:

The commission does not recommend the implementation of facial recognition technology, as it is not an effective tool for wider prevention of harm in gaming venues in Tasmania.

'Agree', said the government at the time. The comment from the government was, under then treasurer Michael Ferguson:

The government supports the commission's view that facial recognition technology is not an effective tool for wider prevention of harm in gaming venues other than identifying already excluded persons.

How far we fell. By late 2024, following the state election, and after minister Ferguson had lost his portfolio as Finance minister, the government walked back from the card, saying

it was too expensive. That was the MaxGaming report, although we've never seen what the cost estimate was, because that was redacted in the report. It walked back from the card, saying it was too expensive and it wanted to follow a national approach. This line is a weak and predictable line that any Tasmanian government will use when it doesn't want to take action on a particular policy area. It will say, oh, there's no point in doing anything about it, we'll just wait for a national approach.

It's gutless and it's a cop-out, because of course here in Tasmania we can set our own rules, we can pass our own legislation and make our own regulations to rein in this industry, but successive major-party governments have determined that they won't, because they're too frightened of the Tasmanian Hospitality Association and the corporations they represent. We have heard, and I don't know if other members have heard, a rumour that was doing the rounds that Premier Rockliff had committed to the Tasmanian Hospitality Association that Ferg 'would not be finance minister' after the 2024 state election. That came to pass, and then Nic Street was handed that particular poisoned chalice and made minister.

In Estimates in 2024 the Greens interrogated Mr Street pretty hard, which is a little bit difficult to do with Nic, because he's such a lovely man and a kind person. But when you take on a ministerial portfolio, then you have to deal with difficult questions and uncomfortable situations, and we did put him in one, but he was adamant at that time that the mandatory pre-commitment card policy was fixed and locked in - on track.

It seemed to us at the time that he genuinely believed that that policy was still on track. By the end of that year, 2024, the card was gone. The government walked away from it completely within nine months of the previous state election where no doubt the money flowed from the gambling industry again into Liberal and Labor party coffers. I'm sure more went into the Liberals than it did into Labor, but that is what happened. And indeed last year at the state election, members will recall that we passed in this place, late in 2024, amendments to the *Electoral Disclosure and Funding Act* which provided for a donation disclosure threshold of \$1000, and it came into effect on 1 July 2025. The election, remember, was on 18 July.

What do you know, when the Australian Electoral Commission returns came in in February this year, it was revealed that \$217,700 was donated through the Tasmanian Hospitality Association to the Liberals between 27 and 30 June 2025 - so, \$216,700 over what would be the donation disclosure threshold from 1 July. That is how cynical this industry is. Of course, they were covering all bases. The THA also donated \$31,000 to Labor at the end of June.

Let's not forget how really ruthless this industry, through the Tasmanian Hospitality Association, can be. Between sometime in 2012 or 2013 during the Labor-Greens government, the then opposition leader Will Hodgman and the Liberal Party agreed with a policy of \$1 bet limits, which would be a really outstanding harm minimisation measure, whereas instead of being able to put \$5 or \$10 a throw in at any given time, the maximum you could place into a machine at any given time was \$1. That was for a brief and impressive period of time the Liberal Party's policy.

Well, what do you know, just as they did with Labor when Labor tried to do the right thing in 2018, back then in 2012-13, the THA came down on the Hodgman Liberals like a tonne of bricks - frightened them, undoubtedly threatened them. The threat only has to be a political one on an island this small to have an effect, and it certainly had an effect because the

Liberals walked away from the \$1 bet limit policy just as in 2018 Labor walked away from the poker machines at a pubs and clubs policy. Now we've got a Liberal government that's walking away from a mandated pre-commitment card policy because the industry doesn't like it. The industry doesn't like it because, as the Deloitte report makes clear, it would substantially carve into the industry's income where it says at 3.22:

The reforms are estimated to reduce EGM ... gambling expenditure by 27%-58% under the modelled scenarios ...

No wonder the industry worked so hard and donated so much money to prevent this nation-leading harm minimisation from being brought to Tasmania.

**Ms Webb** - How effective is that given we know half the profit comes from people being harmed and that is exactly what's going to be potentially carved off?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes, that's right, but they've won. They've won again because, unlike gambling addicts, the industry here is the house, and the house always wins. The industry here always wins on gambling. I can't recall any point since Wrest Point was approved where the industry hasn't got exactly what it wanted. It might have taken a little bit longer, but they've got exactly what they wanted every single time, and it's come at the expense of the Tasmanian people.

We now have the Deloitte report out which the government - again, as is their way - worked really hard to hide. Then they slipped it out without fanfare on the day that one of the most gaslighting media releases from a government minister that you could ever imagine landed. I know that the honourable member for Nelson went through the statements in this media release point by point and very, very thoroughly, and I'm not going to do that, but this media release from the Treasurer, Mr Abetz, on 23 January 2026, is pure gaslighting. It could have been written by the Tasmanian Hospitality Association's Steve Old, because it has given the THA everything they want, yet again.

We are told, we are lied to, in the first line where we are told the Tasmanian government is delivering a strong suite of new harm minimisation measures for electronic gaming machines in hotels and clubs. New measures include longer closing hours for gaming areas in hotels and clubs. Whoopy-doo. A Ticket In and Ticket Out system - which was demolished by the honourable member for Nelson - and provisions to make self-exclusion immediate.

The Treasurer says:

The government is also taking strong action to protect those who need it while also respecting individual choice.

It's so cynical. He says:

As a community, we must seek to protect the most vulnerable among us. We also must accept that people have a right to their own agency. As a government, our focus is to reduce red tape and regulation, not personal freedoms.

How about saving lives and livelihoods because you have the power here to implement a policy which your own Liquor and Gaming Commission says will have a profound and positive effect, not just on the lives of individuals and families, but also on small businesses and the whole of Tasmania's economy? In fact, they found that the only sector which would not benefit from mandatory pre-commitment was the gambling sector, the pokies lobby.

We are also told there will be a cap on electronic gaming machines for hotels and clubs, and we've been reminded that that cap, historically, has not been met; that hotels and clubs have until 30 June this year to apply for licences to meet this cap should they wish. Then after 30 June, a new cap will be in place, which will be the number of EGMs taken up at this point. What we are being promised here is the same thing Peter Gutwein promised us after the last backflip to the THA, which is that there would be a cap on the number of poker machines in Tasmania, as if that's a good thing when you set the cap at saturation point.

This technology, which the government has been advised by Deloitte is not effective, we are told by the Treasurer:

Facial recognition technology will be mandatory with images of all registered excluded patrons obtained through the Tasmanian Gaming Exclusion Scheme. This is designed to make venues more effective at enforcing exclusion.

Which they never have. Remembering that facial-recognition technology is the harm-minimisation technology 'of choice' by the gambling industry, and the first party in this place to adopt it, certainly in the House of Assembly, was the Tasmanian Labor Party during the 2022 debate on the legislation where we had the then shadow treasurer, Dean Winter, saying that Labor's policy of choice was to have facial-recognition technology, that Labor did not support a mandatory pre-commitment scheme. Why is that? Because the THA disciplined Tasmanian Labor after the 2018 state election and locked them in at the 2021 state election.

We have a government here that has gone down the path of so many major-party governments content to pay lip service to harm-minimisation and gaslight us, while within the space of a year nearly \$200 million has gone out of the pockets of everyday Tasmanians straight into the vaults of the pokies lobby.

We have staggering losses. In January 2026 alone, \$17.4 million went into those machines. Can you imagine a world in which \$17.4 million in January went into making sure that the children in our lives had a good meal and got off to school and had access to the recreational opportunities that they deserved, when you're spending some of that money down at the corner store and at other local businesses? The economic uplift from that would be significant. That is a core theme of the Deloitte report that the government commissioned and then ignored and then tried to hide.

I will leave tonight with a few words from the wonderful author and historian James Boyce. For any honourable member who wants to better understand the extent of state capture by the gambling industry of major party politicians in here for half a century, I highly recommend this excellent, confronting Tasmanian tragedy. This story is a Tasmanian political tragedy. He says:

On almost every index Tasmania is the most disadvantaged state in Australia. The economist Saul Eslake has recently established that Tasmanians are: 'older, sicker, affected more by disability, less likely to have a job, earning less if employed, and having less by way of real or financial assets than other Australians'. His Tasmania report found that the island state has 'greater concentrations of social and economic disadvantage than any other state or territory, with gross household incomes about a third less than the national average'. Among the poorest of the poor are the more than 8000 people whose gambling is causing 'adverse consequences' to them and their families.

A decentralised population of only half-a-million people means that Tasmanians also enjoy unusually strong community ties. Every second person knows someone with a gambling problem, and one in eight has an immediate family member who is directly affected. About 85 per cent of all the money lost by 'problem gamblers' is through addiction to the world's most dangerous form of poker machine. Industry whistle-blowers have confirmed that these high-intensity machines are designed to capture vulnerable people through 'special features' and encourage them to gamble compulsively. By this measure, the machines have been a great success.

Research commissioned by the Tasmanian government found that the majority of people in a pokies lounge at any time are likely to be clinically defined problem gamblers and that people experiencing negative impacts from their gambling account for about half of poker machine expenditure. In other words, pokie addicts are not just customers of Tasmania's gambling industry, they are its core business.

The new Treasurer knows that. Everyone in the government understands the extent of the harm caused by these machines. At a fundamental level, they understand that what they're doing is wrong. It is wrong by the Tasmanian people. They must, at some level, feel like utter cowards for collapsing to the THA and all who it represents. Including that family, down at the heart of darkness, there in Sandy Bay.

It is not that the Liberal and Labor parties in this state believe that they're doing the right thing by giving the industry exactly what it wants. They absolutely know they are doing something immoral. It is legislative and regulatory immorality. Trying to hide the evidence of your neglect of the Tasmanian people, as they repeatedly have on this issue, as they did through trying to sit on the Deloitte report, is on brand, but it's also very telling, because they knew that when this report came out that Tasmanians would have a greater understanding what had been given away to the THA once again. That was the chance for this island to break free of pokie machines.

We have all met people - we have family members, people we care about in our lives, or constituents - who have been broken by these machines. People who have had their marriages break up, their children taken away from them, their house having to be put on the market. All of us, I am sure, know these people who the THA does not care about, and, regrettably, through their actions abandoning mandatory pre-commitment and giving the industry exactly what it wants, regrettably we are seeing that neither the Liberals in government nor Labor when they were in government, because it is two sides of the same dirty coin, they're not doing the right thing. Their actions say - for all their fine words - that they actually don't care enough about

the lives of battling Tasmanians. They don't care enough about the fact that there's plenty of evidence to show the effect of these machines and that addiction on children.

There was an amazing dataset called 'Kids Come First'; it probably hasn't been around for 8 or 10 years. The Kids Come First dataset was a very stark visual explanation of the lives of Tasmanian children and the primarily negative influences on their lives. You could see in that dataset, in the areas of greatest disadvantage, where there was the highest levels of child safety reports, high levels of poverty and disadvantage - it was like a mirror image, where those children were, the machines were, in those suburbs. That outstanding dataset had been compiled over many years and told us a really important story about what is happening with our children. It gave us the clues to make their lives much better and providing them with greater opportunities for a successful life. Successive governments here chose not to pick up those clues because they are absolutely captured by the gambling industry here, which has had its foot on the throats of governments for more than 50 years, throttling democracy, throttling good public policy, and really damaging the Tasmanian economy on the way through because of the hundreds of millions of dollars that has come out of the pockets of Tasmanians and gone into the pockets of the Farrell family or the Kalis family or whoever else has a business model that relies on ripping money out of the pockets of some of our poorest people to get rich themselves.

On the motion, of course I strongly support the motion and I believe that the last line in the motion is a rhetorical question, in a way, that:

The Legislative Council calls on the Tasmanian government to release immediately the 2024 Deloitte Access Economics' social and economic impact review report of the poker machine pre-commitment card policy.

What's that?

**Ms Webb** - That's not the motion.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's not your motion?

**Ms Webb** - It's not the motion we're debating today, I don't think. It's not about release -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Sorry. I've got the other one. This is from my folder.

**Ms Webb** - Last year.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes. Thanks very much. To explain the modelling, it's the modelling.

**Ms Forrest** - Start all over again.

**Mr Gaffney** - You got all the way back to the start.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'm tired. Anyway, the motion number (3) that's on here -

**Ms Rattray** - No. There's only (2)(a) and (2)(b).

**Ms Forrest** - Can we assist?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You probably can assist me. I remember reading it and thinking it was rhetorical:

The Legislative Council calls on the Tasmanian Government to confirm in relation to the announced measures of 23 January 2026, whether:

... modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the Government announced measures ...

No. The modelling wouldn't have been done by government and it wouldn't have been done by the THA, because they don't want the answers to those questions:

and ... whether, prior to the decision to adopt the measures, the Government obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on the effectiveness of the announced measures to prevent or reduce harm from poker machines.

Two rhetorical questions: I don't believe that modelling has been done, but certainly if it has been done, the Council should be able to have a look at it.

I commend the motion, and thanks for your assistance.

[9.17 p.m.]

**Ms FORREST** (Murchison) - Mr President, I rise to support the motion. I thank the honourable member for Nelson for bringing it forward. I note that this is a matter that people have very strong views about, and there are many members of this House, and community broadly, who have had very serious impacts from gaming machines in their lives, and I just acknowledge that, and for anyone who may watch or read this later to be aware I'm very cognisant of that. I note that as a House of review, our key function is not to rubberstamp decisions already made by the executive, but to scrutinise them, to ask whether they are grounded in evidence, whether they serve the public interest, and whether the people most affected have been given proper consideration.

That's what this motion effectively asks us to do. I note the member for Nelson has raised many of the points as listed in the motion and the report referenced in the motion, and I just wish to touch on some briefly, but I won't try to go over all the matters the member for Nelson has raised; but this is a matter that is of critical importance to so many in our community, regardless of their political views and allegiances. Going back to some of the member for Hobart's comments about a certain election: I remember being at a public function, talking to a dyed-in-the-wool, rusted-on, intergenerational Liberal voter who told me they were going to vote Labor for the first time in their life, and that their forebears would be rolling in their graves; having that person tell me that, such was the strong view this person had on this matter. Political allegiances aside, this is not a political matter in that regard. It's a human matter.

On 23 January 2026, two things happened simultaneously: the Tasmanian government published a detailed, independently modelled report prepared by Deloitte Access Economics - I understand it was commissioned from the Department of State Growth - that demonstrated the previously planned mandatory poker machine player card with loss limits would deliver substantial net economic and social benefits to Tasmania. On the same day, the government announced it would not be implementing that reform - that's a good,

evidence-based approach. Instead, it released a different, lesser package of measures. It seems the government didn't expect this outcome from their own commissioned report - a bit of a shock, perhaps. If they did read it, they just ignored it. The motion notes both of these matters together and put two specific questions to the government. Those questions are not aggressive, they're not partisan, they're basically accountability questions that any responsible parliament should ask when evidence points one way and policy goes another.

I will address the evidence, the government's alternative measures, the alarming new figures of poker machine losses, now at a decade high, and what the two questions in this motion require the government to answer.

The motion notes a number that must sit at the centre of this debate: Tasmanians' annual poker machine losses for 2024-25 totalled \$193,908,165.

**Ms Rattray** - No cents.

**Ms FORREST** - A lot of cents. That's almost \$200 million. This is a decade high - the amount of money that's been lost by predominantly Tasmanians on our poker machines.

**Ms Webb** - We're on track for \$200 million this financial year - north of \$200 million.

**Ms FORREST** - Let me say that again: this is not a decade low, or high. Not a plateau. It's a decade-high figure that we should, and must, take seriously. At the very moment the Tasmanian government was preparing to shelve the mandatory pre-commitment card - a measure its own independent regulator recommended to address gambling harm and a measure one of their own, the member for Bass and former treasurer and minister for Finance, Michael Ferguson, had championed and I commend him for that - Tasmanians were losing more money on poker machines than at any other point in the preceding 10 years. I think Mr Ferguson knew about that. I'm sure he did - and it concerned him deeply, too.

To put that figure into perspective, the Fifth Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania, published in 2021, recorded electronic game machine expenditure of \$174 million, itself a 15 per cent reduction from the fourth SEIS in 2017. Yet, by 2024-25, losses had climbed back to \$193.9 million - almost \$200 million. That was significantly above the 2017 level. This is not a picture of a gambling market managing itself. This is a picture of a gambling market in which harm is growing and is in the context of which the government's decision to defer and dilute reform must be assessed. I think it's precisely why the members brought this motion before us today.

Clause (a) of the motion adequately summarises the findings of the Deloitte Access Economics report, and I will examine most of the findings in a little bit of detail. This report suggests the best available evidence on this question, and that's what it represents in this report. Remember, it was commissioned by the government. The report was prepared by Deloitte Access Economics for the Department of State Growth and published in December 2025. It uses a computable general equilibrium modelling - the same regression methodology used to assess the economy-wide impacts of major Commonwealth policy reforms. It's a robust model. Three scenarios were assessed: significant substitution, central scenario, and maximum cashless effects.

The reform model was the mandatory account-based cashless card system with mandatory loss limits and session breaks - the player card that the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission had been developing since this 2022 recommendation. In the central scenario, the reform adds approximately \$230 million to Tasmania's gross state product and creates over 200 net additional jobs. That's pretty good.

**Ms Webb** - That's substantial.

**Ms FORREST** - Pretty good, isn't it, when you look at some of the other things we've modelled. In the most conservative scenario, maximum cashless effects, the reform still adds \$153 million of GSP and 126 in additional jobs. That's the conservative scenario. In the significant substitution scenario, the benefit reaches \$240 million and 238 jobs. Either way you look at it, even if you take the least optimistic view, it still has significant benefit in terms of adding money to the GSP and jobs for Tasmanians. Across all three scenarios the reform generates net economic activity and net additional employment.

This reform would redirect spending in the economy. Tasmanians who previously spent money on EGMs spend that money on other goods and services, so other people benefit as well, not just them. Workers previously suffering gambling-related absenteeism return to higher productivity - another gain. Government saves money on health, housing, justice and corrections services, with savings that flow back through the economy.

I talked previously about savings that can be achieved if only willing to invest in the right places; here is another example. This modelling finds that all industries benefit from the reform, with the sole exception of the EGM sector, which is not surprising, and the hospitality sector that hosts the EGMs. This is absolutely not unexpected, but the benefits to this sector should not come at the expense of fellow Tasmanians who become addicted to the machines due to the very design features deliberately built into the machines.

I've heard the arguments about some of my little pubs around the place in my electorate that this is the only form of entertainment, they tell me, in the region. If we removed them from some of these areas - little pubs and clubs - you might find other things spring up and people might actually have more money to engage with other activities.

Critically, all regions, regardless of whether they are rural or urban, have a positive or neutral economic impact. No one would actually go backwards and that's a really important thing to remember in those rural and regional communities, to think if they lose their poker machines they'll have nothing. All regions have a positive or neutral economic impact, including the regions with a high concentration of EGMs, and we know where they are: they're in my area. Some are in the member for Montgomery's area and the member for Elwick's area. These stand to gain more because they bear more of the current harm. This directly refutes the argument put by industry that reform will hurt regional communities, which are some of the communities I represent, as I've said. The evidence says the opposite. We should rely on evidence. The communities with more EGMs have more to gain from meaningful reform. They have more to gain, not lose.

The reform is estimated to reduce EGM player gambling expenditure by between 23 and 46 per cent across the modelled scenarios. Harm minimisation features, particularly with mandatory loss limits, are the key factors. While the cashless element of the card can increase spending for some players in the absence of limits, most all or of that increase is offset

by a player reaching their mandatory precommitment limits. This is a critical finding that should be read alongside the high decade losses figure. The argument sometimes made by industry that a cashless card simply makes it easier to lose more is not supported by this evidence. The mandatory card changes behaviour because they must set the limit before the session starts, before they get hooked, and when the player is not yet in the grip of the impulse to continue through the design features of the machines.

The greatest reductions in harm fall on moderate-risk and problem gamblers, the cohort who generates the majority of EGM revenue precisely because they lose the most. Nationally, the Productivity Commission has estimated over 40 per cent of poker machine losers come from people with severe gambling disorders, with a further 20 per cent coming from moderate risk gamblers. A reform that specifically targets those cohorts is targeting the right people.

The Deloitte modelling quantifies cost savings to government across a wide range of services: health care, mental health support, homelessness programs, police, courts and corrections. These are real ongoing costs currently borne by government as a consequence of gambling-related harm. These are costs that rarely appear in any budget line labelled 'Gambling Policy' but that flow through Health budgets, Housing budgets, Justice budgets and community service budgets, all of which are under enormous pressure right now.

By making these costs visible and modelling their reduction, the report demonstrates something important: reform does not simply cost government revenue, it saves government money across multiple portfolios over time. That is why the net GSP outcome is positive. That is why an evidence-based government should have acted on this report.

Clause (b) of the motion accurately itemises the government's announced alternative package. I will address some of these measures honestly, acknowledging what merit they contain - I've been clear about what merit they don't have, perhaps. Gaming room closure extended from four to seven hours is a genuine, if modest, harm-reduction measure. Restricting access restricts consumption, and the evidence for closing hours as a partial tool is reasonably established. A 75 per cent increase in mandatory closure time is a real change, and I welcome that. I'm not saying don't do that. But seven hours of closure means 17 hours of daily operation. For a person with a serious gambling disorder, 17 consecutive hours of daily access is not a meaningful structural barrier. It does not limit what that individual player spends within the 17 hours. It is an improvement over four hours, but it's not a structural solution. It's more like window dressing.

The TITO limits tickets to a maximum load of \$200 with a machine capable of holding only \$100 at any given time. TITO is a widely used gambling industry technology whose primary purpose is operational efficiency. That's what it's for. Its harm-minimisation credentials, such as they are, are secondary and limited. The critical point is this: the TITO is not a player card, a denomination limit is not a spending limit in a meaningful sense such as deployed by the pre-commitment card. A patron can load and reload tickets repeatedly within a session. It almost gives this false sense of 'I'm not spending as much'. Without a player-based account, while there is no mechanism to track cumulative expenditure over a session, a day, a month, a year, the player-level tracking is precisely what the mandatory card provides and what TITO cannot replicate, and it could actually cause increased harm.

The proposed new cap on EGMs is really a policy of natural attrition, in my view. The current cap of 2350 EGMs in hotels and clubs has historically not been met. Under the new

arrangements, venues may apply for licences up to that cap before 30 June 2026, after which a new cap is set at the number actually licensed. Subsequently, every second machine surrendered or forfeited is removed from the cap. As I said, it's a policy of reduction through natural attrition that will take generations.

There is an important irony here. The invitation to apply for additional licences before the cap resets could, in the short term, increase the number of operating EGMs. Natural attrition is, by its nature, slow and unpredictable. This is not a supply-reduction strategy; it's a supply-management strategy. There's not any constrained demand.

Next is the immediate self-exclusion and facial-recognition technology. Again, this has some merits. Improvements to self-exclusion are genuinely worthwhile. Making the process immediate through QR codes at venues removes friction that has been a real barrier, as I understand, to people seeking help. That is a good reform. Facial-recognition technology linked to the Tasmanian Gambling Exclusion Scheme will make it harder for excluded patrons to access gaming rooms undetected. This too has genuine merit.

However, we should also understand what these measures can't do. They only reach people who have already identified as having a problem severe enough to seek exclusion. To get to that, often they're in a pretty bad way. They do not intervene for the moderate-risk gambler who has not yet sought help. The Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission's 2022 report recommending the mandatory player card explicitly noted that facial recognition was not an effective tool for the wider prevention of gambling harm, only for enforcing exclusion orders already in place. That distinction matters. These measures are reactive. The pre-commitment card is proactive.

Allowing ATMs in gaming venues deserves direct scrutiny. Our member for Nelson spoke extensively about this. The government is permitting ATMs to be placed inside gaming venues - subject to conditions that they carry facial-recognition technology and daily withdrawal limits. Tasmania previously has restricted ATM placement in gaming rooms for a very good reason: proximity to cash increases gambling. The research on this is clear. Now, ATMs - if this goes ahead - will be onsite. This makes cash more accessible to gamblers, not less. The mitigation - so-called - of facial recognition to detect excluded patrons and a daily withdrawal limit addresses a narrow problem, while potentially increasing exposure to the broader population of at-risk gamblers not yet on the exclusion register.

There is also potential within the package itself if the government's direction is toward cashless gaming, which is the premise of the ticket-in, ticket-out system, then making cash more accessible by installing ATMs inside venues moves precisely in the opposite direction. The two elements pull against each other; it seems very counterintuitive to me.

The other matter is the three gaming officers to be employed statewide by Hospitality Tasmania. There are 91 venues, 17 hours a day of operation. Three statewide officers is not a compliance infrastructure; it's a gesture toward one. However, the more important concern is structural. These officers have to be employed by Hospitality Tasmania, the industry body, not an independent statutory regulator, the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission. If the former member for Windermere were here, he would say it was like the fox in charge of the henhouse.

Officers employed by an industry body serve, at least in part, that industry's interests. They have two masters here if this goes ahead. Officers reporting to the independent regulator serve the public interest, not the industry they are allegedly monitoring. This structural choice, mirroring the broader shift of ministerial responsibility for gaming from community services to hospitality and small business announced in November 2024, sits behind some of this. Maybe it has been a work in progress for some time. It is a meaningful change. Whose interests is the harm-minimisation framework designed to serve? That is the question and we should think about it.

I mentioned previously, the \$193,908,165 figure in clause (c) of the motion is not merely a statistic; it's actually an indictment. The mandatory pre-commitment card was announced, a deadline of September 2025 was set, and the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission worked toward implementation. In November 2025, the deadline was deferred indefinitely on the basis of a complexity assessment by MaxGaming - the commercial entity contracted to implement the system - rather than independent expert advice. The Deloitte report commissioned and in preparation throughout this period was published on 23 January 2026, yet on the same day we have the alternative package announced. In the financial year 2024-25 Tasmanians lost almost \$200 million on poker machines, a decade high.

The Grattan Institute observed in 2024 that the gaming industry's profits rely on high-risk heavy spenders. Survey data indicates that about 5 per cent of those who use pokies account for approximately half of the total spending. This argument about recreational users does not stack up when you look at the actual figures. When losses hit a decade high, it is not because casual gamblers are mildly overindulging, it is because people who cannot stop are losing more than ever. As I said, these machines are designed to addict the user.

These are the Tasmanians for whom the pre-commitment card was designed. These are the Tasmanians the January 2026 package is least equipped to help. That's the government package. The Australia Institute has shown that under most models, the cost of EGM-related problem gambling in Tasmania, estimated at up to \$184 million in 2011, far exceeds EGM tax revenue. As losses climbed past \$193 million in 2024.25, the gap between social cost and fiscal term is not closing, it is widening.

Mr President, we move to clause (2) of the motion, which calls on the government to answer two specific questions, and I agree with comments that have already been made - they are moderate, targeted and entirely reasonable. They are the minimum that accountability requires.

The government commissioned and published rigorous CGE modelling of the pre-commitment card, and modelling showed net benefits of \$153 million to \$240 million in gross state product and between 126 and 238 net additional jobs across all scenarios. The government declined to implement that reform and instead announced a different package. The motion simply asked what equivalent independent modelling was done on the alternative package. That's the first thing.

Was there an independent body that assessed the social and economic impact of seven-hour closing, ticket-in, ticket-out, natural attrition, facial recognition, ATMs in venues and three gaming officers employed by Hospitality Tasmania?

What are those impacts? Were those impacts quantified? How do they compare with what the Deloitte report rejected for the pre-commitment card? Surely, we need to compare apples with apples.

To date, as I understand it, I haven't seen any modelling that's been published. I'm sure the member for Nelson would have circulated it if it had been, or the government. If it exists, Tasmanians actually deserve to see it. If it doesn't exist, if the government adopted this package without independent modelling of its social and economic impacts, then this is very telling, about the attitude of this government to gambling harm through EGMs and the public should know.

Mr President, as members know, the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission is the independent statutory regulator. In 2022, it assessed the evidence and recommended the mandatory precommitment card as the most effective, valuable harm-minimisation measure and had been working toward it.

This was supported by the then treasurer and the minister for Finance, Mr Ferguson. This motion asked, before the government decided to adopt the January 2026 alternative measures instead, did it obtain any advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on whether those measures would be effective in preventing or reducing harm from poker machines. The TLGC's report of 2022 explicitly assessed facial-recognition technology and concluded it was not effective for wider harm prevention, only for exclusion enforcement. I'm not saying it has no value, but that's where its value lies.

Did the TLGC advise the government that the January 2026 package as a whole was an adequate substitute for the mandatory pre-commitment card? Or did the government adopt this package without that independent expert advice?

In November 2024, the deferral was justified by reference to the report from MaxGaming, as I mentioned, a commercial gaming service provider, not the independent regulator. MaxGaming sold a complexity and costing process. MaxGaming's stated aim is to achieve the best outcome for the industry. That's who they are working for. This is not the same as independent expert advice on harm-minimisation effectiveness. We and the people of Tasmania are entitled to know whether the TLGC was consulted, what it advised and whether the advice supported the January 2026 announcements.

I want to make a broader observation about what this situation represents for evidence-based government. The commissioned independent modelling was eventually published - it took a little while, but it was published. It produced clear positive findings across all three scenarios it considered. On the same day that modelling was published, the government announced a completely different policy direction. We know what the evidence shows with regard to the pre-commitment card, but the government did not put it in the public domain. The domain is there not about the facts related to this matter; it's more about the government's response to these facts.

When a government commissions independent expert analysis, receives findings that favour their particular course of action, they'd be all over it. When the report favours the action that they don't want to take, then it takes a different course of action, which it has done here, without publishing equivalent independent analysis to support the alternative, that is unacceptable from the accountability point of view.

The two questions in this motion are asking for exactly that minimum. We're not asking the government, at this point, to reverse its decision. We are asking to show its workings; how it got to that point. That should not be a difficult question to fulfil, if the workings exist. The stakes are not abstract: over \$193 million, a decade high, in EGM losses. EGM density concentrated in our most disadvantaged communities - mine, the member for Elwick's, the member for Montgomery's. It's a pattern the Deloitte report's own data makes clear. These are the Tasmanians that need effective policy. They are also too often the Tasmanians with the least political power to demand it.

I support this motion. It accurately summarises the Deloitte report's four key findings. It itemises the government's 2026 package. It makes clear the amount of losses that we've seen, and are seeing, at the moment, and it asks the government two clear questions. I want to be clear, before I finish up, that I'm not saying the government's January 2026 measures are entirely without value. Extended closing hours, improved self-exclusion, and better enforcement of exclusions have genuine, if limited, merit. I acknowledge these measures. They should be doing all of it - all the things that we know work.

What I'm saying here is that the government has adopted a package that falls substantially short of its own commissioned evidence and what that supports. It has done so without publishing any equivalent independent modelling or revealing whether the independent regulator was consulted on the effectiveness. This is a failure of evidence-based government. It's a failure that falls most heavily on the Tasmanians who are harmed by poker machines.

The Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission recommended the mandatory pre-commitment card. The former treasurer and deputy premier described it as the gold standard of harm minimisation. I agree with him. The Deloitte report confirms that it would deliver net economic benefits of \$153 million to \$240 million, and meaningful, targeted reductions in harm.

The question this motion asks is straightforward: show us the modelling and tell us whether you asked the regulator. It's pretty simple. If the government cannot answer both these questions adequately, this Council will have learned something important about how this decision was made and about whose interests it is designed to serve.

I support the motion.

[9.48 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Mr President, as Chair of the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets in 2017, I've always held a keen interest in the impact of gambling. I acknowledge and express my appreciation to the member for Nelson for bringing this matter before the Legislative Council, and her excellent contribution in this place. I also acknowledge other members and the work that they've put forward.

The 2017 Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets considered community attitudes towards gambling in Tasmania, reviewed social and economic impact studies for Tasmania, and considered various mechanisms for managing electronic gaming machines. As Chair of that committee, we received a significant amount of evidence towards the negative impact of gambling on local communities, particularly electronic gaming machines.

In addressing the motion, I will speak specifically to the impact of gambling in Tasmania, the need for swift and decisive action to protect Tasmanians, and the lapses by the government in adhering to its own commitments, especially considering national and international advances in gambling regulation.

Of course, Tasmanians are particularly vulnerable to the gambling industry preying upon them, having a higher average age than in most Australian states, lower income and worse educational outcomes. This vulnerability is even more pronounced in my electorate of Mersey. As the member for Nelson highlights, gambling foists a significant impost on the Tasmanian people. As we heard, this year it's on track to go over \$200 million in losses across the state on electronic gaming machines alone. That is an average of \$350 per person, per year, if every Tasmanian gambles. Every Tasmanian does not gamble. Not even half of them gamble, let alone have a problem with it. The impost that this has on certain groups of Tasmanians is huge. It must be managed better.

In a general sense, the social and economic cost of gambling is well known. It is a driver of addiction and economic hardship, exposing communities and society indirectly to hardship, psychological distress and gambling-related suicide risk. It is a real issue in Tasmania, and the industry makes a disproportionate amount of its profit preying on those who suffer harm because of it.

Of course, there is evidence to show that certain Tasmanian communities are disproportionately affected by gambling addiction, notably related to access to numerous electronic gaming machines within local venues. The portion of revenue which Tasmanian gambling derives from problem gamblers is disproportionate compared to that of other states. One must question the efficacy of current regulation regarding location and accessibility of electronic gaming machines.

It is a shame that the government is slow in implementing change, noting the ongoing calls for reform over the last 15 years. Gambling is an incessant issue that requires swift and decisive action to prevent it from causing harm. Among international allegations of corruption and cartels, protecting Tasmanians from being preyed upon by gambling should be an easy win.

As the motion recognises, there is a question to be had as to whether the Tasmanian government has adequately undertaken modelling on the social and economic impact of the measures it announced on 23 January 2026. Of course, all actions towards minimising the harm of gaming are welcome, but considering the previously planned mandatory poker machine player card with loss limits and its associated benefits in clear harm minimisation, this decision should be examined.

Managing the impacts of gambling on Tasmanians should be a priority, not an afterthought. Those plans developed over years should not be shelved overnight in favour of weaker regulation that does not have a similar base of evidence or support.

Looking to examples in other jurisdictions, it is interesting to note that card limits are often suggested, floated, and discussed in Australia. But every time, it seems the proposal gets quietly shuffled under the rug or otherwise watered down. Look to Victoria - and it is ironic and disappointing for me to say 'look to Victoria' when we could have been a trailblazer in this area. Victoria is currently implementing a loss-limiting scheme, yet it is only mandatory to

have a limit. As a starting default it is set at \$50, but it could be conceivably any number. I'm just noting this is a watered-down version of mandated loss limits. Of course, this is a far sight above no regulation at all, and all credit is due to the Victorian government and the Greens for getting it done, but it still allows problem gamblers a loophole with which to feed their addictions. It continues to allow for the industry to siphon money from vulnerable Victorians.

To my mind, it is the same situation in Tasmania, where we have given up strong mandated loss limits in favour of watered-down regulation, for no apparent reason.

It's interesting - and I digress a bit - during the gambling review, people sometimes had the impression that problem gamblers were just from a certain socio-economic class, and they were the ones whose children weren't being fed. There are a lot of examples of very affluent people - MPs, members of parliament in other states and territories - who also were, and had, addiction problems. They also were losing their houses and their jobs - and they were very well educated. We mustn't just think that it's the person down the street who can't feed the kids who is having the problem. It's a broad brush.

To my mind, it's the same situation in Tasmania. We have given up the strong mandated loss limits in favour of watered-down regulation, for no apparent reason. Looking internationally, some Nordic countries have introduced mandatory casino limits for certain types of gambling. For example, Norway has universal maximum loss limits for daily and monthly amounts for tipping. This loss limit is higher than proposed Australian loss limits, equivalent per month, yet the paper 'Loss limits as a predictor of future gambling behavior' found that it's linked to reductions in gambling intensity and frequency.

Once again, I thank the honourable member for Nelson for her motion. I would like to read her commentary from our previous joint committee on future gaming markets into *Hansard*. She said:

... the state Government's response to [the parliamentary committee's] findings is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for this state. We think it is an opportunity for our state leaders to make clear, accountable and evidence-based decision-making on the future of poker machines for Tasmania.

If only that was the case. It is disappointing that this government has backed down on its commitments, and I hope they've sought some sound advice and made this decision in the best interests of all of the Tasmanian people, not just those sectors it supports.

[9.55 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I thank all the speakers who have provided their contributions and those members who have listened intently during this motion today. I rise to respond to the motion moved by the honourable member for Nelson relating to electronic gaming machines and the Tasmanian government's recently announced harm-minimisation measures. We have heard a little bit about those already - actually, quite a lot.

The government acknowledges that gambling harm is real and it is serious and it has profound impacts on individuals, families and communities. That is not a matter of dispute.

Through the package of measures announced by the Treasurer on 23 January 2026, the government is introducing a package of responsible and effective policy actions with a clear intention of minimising harm from gaming, while monitoring progress interstate of pre-commitment gaming cards. This package delivers on the government's 2024 announcement that foreshadowed stronger harm protections from electronic gaming, including a strengthened exclusion scheme and the use of modern technology to improve enforcement.

As the motion specifies, these measures include: extended mandatory closure periods; a reduced and tightening cap on electronic gaming machines; the introduction of immediate self-exclusion; the integration of facial-recognition technology to strengthen the Tasmanian Gambling Exclusion Scheme; the introduction of gaming care officers; a modernisation through ticket-in, ticket-out; and stronger controls on access to cash. Taken together, this is a substantial and balanced package. It is an approach grounded in harm minimisation, not prohibition, and in balancing the protection of vulnerable Tasmanians with respect for personal agency and lawful recreational choice. That position has been set out publicly and transparently, and has not changed.

Tasmania has the lowest density of EGMs of any state that allows gaming outside of casinos, the lowest spend per capita on EGMs and the lowest prevalence of problem gambling. Through the recent announcement, the government is taking strong action to protect those who need it, while also respecting individual choice. As a community, we must seek to protect the most vulnerable among us and also accept that people have the right to their own agency. The government's position, by its very nature, will mean that its policies seek a balance between minimising harm and maintaining personal choice. It's acknowledged this position is not shared by all in the community or, indeed, the parliament. This will be a fundamental point of difference in certain circumstances.

To the questions posed under the motion, the government welcomes the opportunity to address these questions. Firstly, through (2)(a), the motion asks whether modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the government's announced measures, which is asked in the context of the Deloitte Access Economics reports released in January 2026 under part 1 of the motion. The report did not consider, assess or model the government's current policy position announced on 23 January 2026. However, that is not to say that there will not be a robust and holistic review of the government's package of measures being introduced - a point which I will come back to.

In delivering this package, the government is getting on with the job of delivering on the 2024 commitment to increase harm-minimisation measures while continuing to monitor progress interstate of the pre-commitment gaming card.

The statutory mechanism for assessing the social and economic impacts of gambling in Tasmania is the Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling, which is required every five years under the *Gaming Control Act 1993*. The sixth study is due for completion this year and will provide a baseline. The subsequent study in five years' time will then assess the impacts following implementation of these reforms. That is the appropriate and independent and legislative pathway; it will mean stronger protections and supports are in place right now, rather than taking an additional complex and potentially costly study of the social and economic impacts of the new package of measures.

Secondly, through (2)(b), the motion also asks whether advice was obtained from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission prior to adopting the announced measures. To elaborate on this, and by way of background, the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission is an independent statutory body responsible for regulating liquor and gaming in Tasmania. Its role is to administer and enforce the law, foster responsible gambling behaviour, and oversee compliance - not to set policy direction.

This is not to say that the commission does not have a significant role in shaping implementation of policy and providing information to government as they did in relation to facial-recognition technology and player card gaming. Treasury officers engage regularly with the commission in their operational capacity. The Treasurer stated in the other place that he met with the chair of the commission prior to public announcement of the package.

As reasonably expected, Treasury, as a provider of advice to government on liquor and gaming policy from within the State Service, provided extensive advice to the Treasurer prior to the finalisation of the package of measures. This most recent work built on significant progress completed under the former treasurer, given the government's policy announcement came at the end of 2024.

There is a critical role in the commission implementing the suite of measures, and it is critical for a balanced debate to acknowledge the commission will have a significant role in implementing the government's policy direction. Input from the commission and Treasury informs implementation considerations, but the policy direction itself is appropriately a matter for government.

Tasmania already has the lowest density of EGMs of any state permitting gaming outside casinos, the lowest spend per capita and the lowest prevalence of problem gambling. These reforms strengthen that position. Immediate self-exclusion supported by facial-recognition technology materially improves the effectiveness of the exclusion scheme. It removes delay, reduces reliance on manual identification by venue staff and improves compliance for those who have taken the difficult step of excluding themselves.

Gaming care officers will support early intervention, improve identification of harm indicators and strengthen referral pathways without blurring the line between regulatory enforcement and support.

A 75 per cent increase in mandatory shutdown hours from four to seven continuous hours every day will have the effect of reducing opening hours in those times of days which have been shown to have a higher correlation with problem gambling.

The cap on electronic gaming machines will also be tightened and will ratchet down over time through natural attrition.

Ticket-in, ticket-out represents long-overdue modernisation. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction still relying on coin-only EGMs in hotels and clubs, which requires venues to incur significant insurance costs and manual handling of heavy loads of coins, in addition to the capital cost of carrying significant amounts of coins on premises. Ticket-in, ticket-out, when introduced alongside lower load limits, ticket value caps and stronger cash access controls, introduces forced breaks in play and enables better oversight, not more harm.

In conclusion, the government does not shy away from the reality of gambling harm, nor does it claim that any single reform is a silver bullet. The government believes that the package of measures announced on 23 January 2026 is a balanced and responsible set of measures that strengthen protections for vulnerable Tasmanians. They modernise regulation, respect the independence of the regulator and clearly separate policy direction from enforcement.

[10.06 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Thank you, Madam Deputy President. Thank you to members for their contributions on the motion. I appreciate those who shared their thoughts and also reflected from their different perspectives on this topic, which is one we have periodically encountered in this state and in this place for us to discuss in terms of impact and all the range of problematic issues that swirl around it.

Thank you to the member for Hobart. I appreciated your reflections, particularly in relation to that trajectory of capture that we have seen in the state for, as you say, 50 years now, or most likely more.

I appreciate the member for Murchison's contribution and going through the various matters in the motion and contributing her thoughts to that. I very much appreciate her nodding to the fact that various government measures may not do any harm and may well be worthwhile putting forward - we don't have any evidence for it, but it won't hurt, necessarily. Some of them, though, may well hurt. That is problematic. The government can't tell us that they won't because they haven't put the evidence to it or modelled it.

The member for Mersey, thank you. I think there is an enduring interest there because of that inquiry back in 2017. It was a really big inquiry, and it was a worthwhile one to get a whole lot of material on the record about the impact of poker machines on this state. I appreciate your ongoing interest and the fact you pointed out that addiction can in fact affect anyone. Certain factors do make you more vulnerable to developing an addiction if you happen to sit down in front of poker machines. I spoke about some of those in my contribution. Of course, those factors can be present in any socio-economic group, factors like stress, grief and trauma. Proximity to poker machines could be present in other groups as well, but we have purposefully clustered them in lower socio-economic communities. We've really put them in harm's way. I appreciate that.

There are some matters I have picked up on that have come out in the government's response. It's really quite farcical, to be honest, to stand here and make these statements and to make the point of pointing out to members that they have been presented with no evidence base whatsoever and no modelling whatsoever. They are empty claims.

To go straight to the final comment from the Leader on behalf of the government, it's astonishing to say there is no single reform that's a silver bullet. That might be true, but every single thing the government claims it's trying to achieve with its list of measures that it announced on 23 January - every single thing that they announced - can be done better with a player card. We know that for sure from evidence. Improvements to the exclusion scheme with facial-recognition technology can be done better by a player card. Ensuring that everybody is better protected who uses poker machines can be absolutely done better by a player card than any of the things the government has suggested. The sorts of modernisation they want to achieve by implementing a TITO system - a very old system from interstate, by the way - can be achieved better with a player card. The sorts of things you might want to be putting in place

by extending closing hours or putting caps on machines - neither of which can be shown to directly impact harm and reduce it - can be done better by a player card because we know that will. Evidence tells us it will. It has been modelled.

While a player card, we might not go so far as to say it's a silver bullet, it's pretty damn close to a silver bullet. The government knows it. It's got every bit of evidence telling it that. Every single expert has told it that. We now have independent modelling that tells us that. For them to turn around and say there is no silver bullet is actually utterly insulting. It is absolutely cruel and offensive to the tens of thousands of Tasmanian people who in some way or another are impacted on and harmed by poker machine gambling. Offensive to say there is no silver bullet, nonsense.

Equally offensive is the government talking about this nonsense about balancing - how is it that they phrase it? - balancing harm and choice. Well, guess what? There is nothing balanced about the way the government is approaching it because nothing that they have put forward is going to materially impact harm, reduce harm. It is absolutely ridiculous to suggest there is any balance here.

By the way, it is absolutely a choice that people can exercise under a card; they are empowered to make good choices with a card. A card gives them information, it gives them choice and control, it gives them the ability to track their losses and gives them the ability to make choices about what limits they might set because the card allows people to change the limits that are on it. You have to be able to show if you want to increase it beyond the standard amount set. You have to be able to show that you can afford to do that, but it provides you with a choice to do that. You can lower the preset loss limits if you like. Plenty of choice, plenty of control, plenty of balance, actually. We know at this point that half the money going into machines and going as profits to the pokies industry is coming from people being harmed, we know that's the case. There is nothing balanced about that, absolutely nothing. That's entirely serving the profit interests of one industry and a small number of people in that industry, quite frankly, and entirely against and victimising Tasmanians who are vulnerable to these machines.

It isn't a matter of having a different opinion about what the balance between harm and choice look like, this is policy-making by a state government on a public health issue that is well documented and understood. What we expect of state government in that sense is to do policy development that is based on evidence and based on putting public interest first. It's not about having a different opinion, this is about following evidence and having solutions to public health issues that work.

We know what that would be - it would be a player card. It is absolutely offensive for the government to suggest here we have a different opinion about what's the best way forward. We're not. We have one side to make a case for a player card that's entirely backed by evidence and well-nigh a silver bullet, and we have the government, who are putting forward a spurious list of things that have been shown to be marginally effective at best in some instances, and likely to be more harmful in others. That's what we've got here on the two sides of this argument. It is not a difference of opinion. It's like saying if there's a difference of opinion by saying the earth is round and someone saying the earth is flat. It is not a difference of opinion. Someone has the facts backed by evidence and someone is just spouting nonsense.

It is really clear the government tries to explain that they don't want to take the time to model the social and economic impact of their list of measures like what was done by the

Deloitte report. I presume that sort of modelling could be turned around in a matter of mere months, actually. Deloitte has just done it for the card. You could probably get them to do it again for the list of measures the government has put forward. We are talking about the government not wanting to take the time to do that because we have to act right now instead of waiting around to study the impact.

Here's the thing though. In the briefing I had from the government and what they have been quite up front about is these measures are not being implemented immediately, some come into effect in the middle of this year, on 30 June. For example, the matters relating to bringing the cap down, potentially. But others, like the TITO system and some of the facial-recognition exclusion systems, aren't coming online for another two years. This is a two-year program of work. If we can't take the time to take a couple of months to have a straightforward bit of modelling done on these measures - perhaps by Deloitte, who have just done it on the pokies card - to tell us whether they are going to work or not, then, actually, we are just waiting around to waste our money on them - or maybe not. Maybe we are not wasting our money on them, maybe we are saving the money for the industry and what we know will be some donations in the future. Maybe that is what we are waiting to do.

**Ms O'Connor** - One hundred per cent.

**Ms WEBB** - Absolutely spurious. There is literally nothing that was put forward in the government's response here, and it's unfortunate that the Leader for the Government had to read out that nonsense, quite frankly. Nothing about that enables us to point to any evidence, anything, to dispute the assertions that I have made, which is that this is entirely dictated by industry. The government has come to heel, delivered them exactly what they want, there is no evidence to support it, it won't work in reducing harm, and in following this path and throwing out the player card, the government has demonstrated that it is absolutely putting vested interests first above human lives in this state, above the lives of vulnerable Tasmanians.

I find it very interesting to hear the things that are blatantly misleading about what the government says about its measures. There is a lot more to dig into here around the assertions made by government, and more and more it comes to light that they do not know what they are talking about - they have put forward these measures.

In the government's response they talked about the extension of the closing hours from four hours to seven hours. They said that it would mean that at the times of day when there is a higher propensity for problem gamblers to be betting, they would be better protected. That is nonsense. There is nothing in the government's policy that says when those closing hours have to happen. There is nothing in the government's policy that says the seven hours of closing, up from four, have to be at a time when people are likely to be harmed, and we know exactly when that would be but that is not what's required. Venues can close for those seven hours whenever they wish. Most venues already close for seven hours a day. A very small proportion are currently open for the entire 20 hours allowable. Not only will this measure not affect, probably, more than a handful of venues around the state, but government is now trying to be deceptive to pretend that their required seven hours is going to somehow be targeted at harmful times of the day - rubbish. That is not in the policy.

There is so much more to dig into here about what is being claimed by the government, about who suggested it to the government, about the absolute invisibility of any policy work actually done on this by the government. The Leader's response on behalf of the government

seemed to suggest that Treasury had done a bunch of policy work on this - not the commission, but Treasury. They didn't speak to the commission until after the Cabinet decision was made; that was very clear from the Treasurer in the other place. The commission didn't do any policy work on it, but apparently Treasury did.

Well, here's the thing: when I sat down from my briefing there was a person from Treasury there. In fact the person the Treasurer referred to in the other place didn't know squat about the details of these measures, couldn't answer any of the questions. Either that means I was having information about them withheld from me, and I wasn't having my questions answered honestly or openly, or that person from Treasury, who was apparently the one who advised into this space on this list of measures, actually knows very little about them and isn't able to provide the information, so, therefore that policy work hasn't been done. I am not saying that as a reflection on that person from Treasury. This is all under the direction of the government, under the Treasurer, and it is the fault of Cabinet if it made decisions with literally no policy work behind them. If they had policy work, then point us to it. Where is the evidence?

It is absolutely astonishing that in the government's response we heard not once, but twice, the Leader on behalf of the government said that we have the lowest spend in the country and the lowest prevalence of problem gambling. Well, guess what, that's what I pointed out in my contribution, too. The protective factors we've had in place here - that mean we have the lowest spend and have the lowest prevalence of problem gambling - are being stripped away by this list of things the government is putting forward. We are moving towards the other jurisdictions that have higher losses, higher levels of harm, and higher levels of problem gambling. We're not moving away from them, we're moving towards them.

The government is absolutely deluded to think that it's a positive to point to the fact that we have the lowest spend and the lowest prevalence compared to other states at the same it's making the case to move towards them in the measures that we're putting in place with the TITO scheme and allowing cash access in venues through ATMs, and things like that. It's absolutely astonishing.

Here's the thing. When I talk about the fact that the 2024-25 losses of \$193 million odd were the highest in a decade - and that's appalling - what we're seeing now is that it's escalating. That is not necessarily unconnected to the fact that we have financial pressure and community pressure building around the cost-of-living issues that everyone is facing. When cost-of-living issues crunch on people, harm from pokies goes up. People are seeking relief through going into that zone. They do seek to chase away the stress that they're facing by sitting in front of a machine.

As I said in my contribution - and I did some quick calculations while other members were making theirs - on the basis so far of the eight months of data we have in this financial year, 2025-26, the monthly losses are looking even higher. When I take the eight months of data that we already have, and I average that as a monthly average for the eight months so far, and then I extrapolate it out to 12 months for this financial year, that has us on track to have losses this financial year of \$209 million-plus. That is an enormous jump. It may not come to pass that we get to exactly \$209 million, but that's what we are on track for so far, looking at the monthly losses across 2025-26. I predict we absolutely will go north of \$200 million in losses. If it gets to \$209 million or more, I believe - and the member for Hobart or the member for Mersey might recall from data they've seen in previous years through their different roles - I think that might be a state record for pokies losses in Tasmania, an annual state record if we

make it to \$209 million in 2025-26. That's appalling. That means as we push towards potentially greater harm with the government's measures, we are in serious trouble. The trajectory of that number will only continue to go up.

It's spurious to say that our SEIS is going to, in any way, evaluate or review the government's measures meaningfully. Of course, that's needed to be done in an evaluative way and a reviewing way, independently and separately. The SEIS is a broad study on many issues to do with prevalence and to do with gambling practices and habits in this state. It provides us with data, but it doesn't evaluate specific elements of our regulatory framework. If the government had any faith in the measures they're putting forward, they'd have them evaluated, they'd have them modelled, they'd have the evidence here ready for us to see. They don't have it and it absolutely stinks to high heaven because this is people's lives - Tasmanian lives - we're talking about.

I think there is a lot more for us to look at here, and as the member for Murchison said, our job is scrutiny. It is the job of this Chamber to look at government policy decisions and ask to be shown where the evidence is and demonstrate that this is the right way forward. I think there are a lot more opportunities to do that on this topic, on these specific measures the government is putting forward, particularly now that we know so much more about how absolutely valuable a player card would be to this state, on every measure available to us.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **RESIDENTIAL PARKS BILL 2026 (No. 2)**

### **First Reading**

**Bill received from the House of Assembly and read the first time.**

[10.25 p.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the second reading of the bill be made an order of the day for Tuesday next.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I thank everyone for their contributions today at this late hour, but it is important that we got through those.

Mr President, I move -

That at its rising the Council adjourn until 11 a.m. on Wednesday 25 March.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the Council do now adjourn.

**Susan Neill-Fraser Case**

[10.26 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Mr President, I rise to inform members of the House and members of the public who are interested in this case of the reason that I have chosen to defer today's notice of motion debate calling for a commission of inquiry into the Susan Neill-Fraser murder conviction.

I genuinely thank the Leader for Government Business and staff for facilitating the opportunity for members to be briefed last Wednesday, 18 March 2026.

It was considered appropriate by the Susan Neill-Fraser support team that this would be a closed session and conducted to enable frank and open discussion. Staff from the Department of Justice were present with the agreement of those attending. The briefing was followed by further closed briefings to members from Tasmania Police and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Those briefings have provided new information for members and, importantly, raised further questions, particularly in relation to the disclosure by the Crown of material that may have been relevant to the defence. Inquiries are now underway to determine the full circumstances of those matters.

As honourable members, we only have one opportunity in a term of government to move a motion for a commission of inquiry into the Neill-Fraser case, I do not wish to press the House to a decision at this time, before additional information can be sought and obtained.

Mr President, this is a complex case, and it is an entirely circumstantial one - no body, no weapon and no motive.

I will bring on the notice of motion for debate in due course. We need to get this right. The fight for justice will continue, and it must, because justice demands nothing less.

**The Council adjourned at 10.28 p.m.**

## Appendix 1

Tabled and incorporated  
into Hansard  
J. Palmer  
24.03.26.



J. Palmer

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Legislative Council

ASKED BY: The Hon. Rosemary Armitage MLC, Independent Member for Launceston

ANSWERED BY: The Hon. Jo Palmer MLC, Member for Rosevears, Minister for Children and Youth.

QUESTION:

- Can the Minister please advise the number of residents at Ashley Youth Detention Centre on a weekly basis by geographic location – i.e. North, North West and South – for the previous six months?

**Table 1: Average weekly number of young people at Ashley Youth Detention Centre - September 2025 to February 2026**

Week ending	North and North West	South	Statewide
5/09/2025	7.8	12.0	19.8
12/09/2025	8.0	12.3	20.3
19/09/2025	7.7	11.3	19.0
26/09/2025	7.0	9.0	16.0
3/10/2025	7.0	8.1	15.1
10/10/2025	6.7	11.4	18.1
17/10/2025	6.6	12.6	19.1
24/10/2025	5.4	12.7	18.1
31/10/2025	5.3	13.3	18.6
7/11/2025	5.7	14.6	20.3
14/11/2025	7.0	14.1	21.1
21/11/2025	6.0	13.6	19.6
28/11/2025	6.1	13.9	20.0
5/12/2025	6.7	14.9	21.6
12/12/2025	5.3	14.9	20.1
19/12/2025	5.4	13.9	19.3
26/12/2025	7.0	10.1	17.1
2/01/2026	7.0	8.3	15.3
9/01/2026	7.0	9.0	16.0
16/01/2026	7.9	9.1	17.0
23/01/2026	7.9	10.0	17.9
30/01/2026	6.7	12.3	19.0
6/02/2026	6.0	12.3	18.3
13/02/2026	6.1	12.4	18.6
20/02/2026	6.0	13.1	19.1
27/02/2026	5.7	11.9	17.6

Note:

Region is the young person's region as it was recorded upon admission.

Regional averages may not equal the statewide average due to rounding.

Data may not align with data published elsewhere due to continual updating of records in source systems.

OFFICIAL

## Appendix 2

*Tabled & incorporated  
into Hansard*

*Paula Rattray  
T. Rattray  
Leader for Government  
Business  
24 March 2026*

# TASMANIA

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SESSION 2026

### NOTICE OF QUESTION

18 March 2026

I (Mrs Armitage) my questions are to the Honourable Leader: -

- (1) Can the Honourable Leader please advise the number of inmates at Risdon Prison, including the Mary Hutchinson female prison, on a weekly basis by geographic location – ie. North, North West and South – for the previous six months?

#### Government response

**Table 1: Monthly Offender Numbers for Risdon Prison (including Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison) based on geographical location.**

	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26
Hobart	152	145	144	137	134	134
South East	65	63	57	65	75	66
Launceston and North East	110	108	115	108	100	85
West and North West	125	131	139	135	129	122
No fixed address	25	24	24	22	30	30
Outside Tasmania	7	8	7	10	9	9
<b>Total Offenders</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>446</b>

#### **Explanatory notes:**

1. Data is as at 18 March 2026. Accordingly, March 2026 represents a partial month only and should be interpreted with caution when compared with prior months.
2. Region is grouped in accordance with the ABS Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) classification.
3. No fixed address includes offenders who have no address or post code recorded in Elite

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4. Due to system limitations, addresses are not captured as a census view. Accordingly, the above counts reflect an offender's last recorded address, rather than the address associated with a particular episode of imprisonment.



Hon Guy Barnett MP  
Deputy Premier  
Attorney-General  
Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation

Date: 20/3/26